The understanding of suicides from a gender perspective in South Sudan

Based on seven qualitative interviews

Kristin Tønnessen Berg

Master oppgave i psykososialt arbeid – selvmord, rus, vold og traumer

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Summary

Globally, more people die from suicide than from war (Schlebusch, 2005), and according to the World Health Organization (WHO) South Sudan has the 13th highest suicide rate in the world (WHO, 2014). The study is based on seven qualitative interviews with South Sudanese with the purpose of getting a better understanding of suicide in South Sudan in a cultural perspective. The interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was applied, ensuring a bottom-up perspective. The data showed that the informants had detailed knowledge about numbers of suicide cases from their communities. Since men have shown a higher vulnerability to suicide than women globally, and this has been confirmed to be the status also in South Sudan (Möller-Leimkühler, 2003; WHO, 2014) the analysis has been focused on gender, and especially masculinity. The participants reported cultural practices and expectations related to the strictly defined gender roles as reasons for suicide in South Sudan, with an emphasis on difficulties associated by fulfilling expectations as a husband, a provider and a protector. This affected both men and women. They thought that men failing to meet the expectations and demands led to a feeling of humiliation and shame, which put them at risk for suicide. Many women became victims of abusive men, and had few ways of escaping such situation, and some were reported to choose suicide as a way of escaping. Women were seen as more resilient because the culture allowed them to show vulnerability, and this gave them the opportunity to seek advice and comfort with fellow women.

Oh God,
We praise and glorify you
For your grace on South Sudan
Land of great abundance
Upholds us united in peace and harmony
Oh motherland
We arise raising flag with the guiding star
And sing songs of freedom with joy
For justice, liberty and prosperity
Shall forevermore reign
Oh great patriots
Let us stand up in silence and respect
Saluting our martyrs whose blood
Cemented our national foundation
We vow to protect our nation
Oh God bless South Sudan

The South Sudan National Anthem

First of all I am grateful for the trust given to me by the South Sudanese women and men who contributed to this study with their time and their engagement in a very difficult time. I owe many thanks to assis. Professor Bojoi Tomorat the University of Juba who helped me with all the practical arrangement necessary. I also want to give thanks to Dr. Simon Monoja, who generously offered to advice me in my research, and who believed in my project. Many thanks for constructive and encouraging supervision from Touraj Ayazi, and also from Edvar Hauff. I wish I had more time to apply your inputs.There are so many friends that have helped me in many different ways: Camilla, Marte, Kristine, Helene, Tina, Melanda, Camilla K., Fredrik, Hilde, Marianne, Toril. Especially I want to thank my father who is the one that introduced me to South Sudan as a child, who came on a *boda boda* to meet me in Juba and taught me how to get to the University by bus, and who has supported me in this project in all possible ways. And to my mother who is the rock in our family.

Most importantly: to Andrea, my star and inspiration. Thank you for believing in me!

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1 Introduction

1.1 Suicide: a public health problem

Every 40 seconds someone dies from suicide (WHO, 2014). Suicide is among the ten leading causes of death in most countries (José M Bertolote & Fleischmann, 2009), and is considered a global public health problem (Apter, Bursztein, Bertolote, Fleischmann, & Wasserman, 2009; WHO, 2001, 2014). Since suicide as reason for death in many cases will be hidden, figures could in reality be higher (José Manoel Bertolote & Fleischmann, 2002). There is also a slight tendency toward an increase of suicide worldwide (Honkasalo & Tuominen, 2014).

Globally, more people die from suicide than from war (Schlebusch, 2005), yet we know little about the prevalence of suicide in most African countries (Retterstøl, Ekeberg, & Mehlum, 2002). The high prevalence of what are considered to be risk factors for suicide, such as poverty, war, trauma, alcoholism and AIDS, makes it likely, however, that the global suicide trends are also applicable to Africa (Ovuga & Boardman, 2009b). Further recent research indicates that suicide behaviour in Africa might be more frequent than generally known (Schlebusch, 2005; Schlebusch, Burrows, & Vawda, 2009). Estimates on suicide across the world released by WHO in September 2014 state that South Sudan has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, ranking as the 13th out of 172 countries surveyed (WHO, 2014).

1.2 The aim of this study

Suicide is a multifactorial problem (Mehlum, 1999), impacted by both psychological, cultural and socio-economic factors. Former studies on suicide indicate that there is an association between the low socio-economic status and suicidality (Honkasalo, 2014; Honkasalo & Tuominen, 2014), and low- and middle-income countries are estimated to carry 75% of the global suicide burden (WHO, 2014). Men have shown a higher vulnerability to suicide than women (Möller-Leimkühler, 2003; WHO, 2014). South Sudan is a country marked by decades of war, which has lead to poverty and instability, and it is a deeply patriarchal society (Stern, 2011). Consequently the aim of this study is to provide an understanding of how cultural expectations shape the way people perceive suicide that they have seen or heard of it in South Sudan, and how these expectations are maintained and/or change in response to the socio-economic context. The study focuses on how many of the informants highlight cultural practices and expectations related to the strict defined gender roles as reasons for suicide in South Sudan, with an emphasis on masculinity.

There are no known qualitative studies on attitudes towards suicide in South Sudan. Given that WHO (2014) states that suicide is a public health problem in South Sudan, there is a need to address this with future suicide prevention programs. This study aims to better inform an effective public health response to suicide and suicide prevention in the country and more generally in the region.

1.3 The term suicide

WHO defines suicide as "an act with fatal outcome, which was deliberately initiated and performed by the diseased, in the knowledge of expectation of its fatal outcome, and through which the deceased aimed at realizing changes he/she desired" (Honkasalo & Tuominen, 2014 p 2-3).

The complexity of suicide makes it difficult to define, and as Silverman et al (2007) points out, it can refer to a great variation of behaviour such as "suicidal thoughts, intentions, ideation, gestures, attempts, completions, equivalents" (Silverman, Berman, Sanddal, O'Carroll, & Joiner, 2007). Shneidman (2007) highlights how the meaning of suicide has changed over time from being seen as a sin and a crime to "being a mental health issue meriting the therapeutic and sympathetic response of others" (Shneidman, 2007 p 245).

In this study I will use the term "suicidal act" which includes both suicide attempts and completed suicides (O'Carroll et al., 1996 p 246) because I found that the informants themselves did not distinguish between an attempt and a completed suicide. Furthermore, the aim of the study was never to verify whether a specific case could be defined as suicide or not, but rather to learn what people thought of when asked about suicide. During the interviews the informants used the phrase "commit suicide" and I adopted their term. However, in this discussion I find it more precise to use the term "suicidal act".

1.4 Structure and limitations of the study

Firstly a literature review will be presented, followed by a short account of the study context. Thirdly the theoretical perspective will be presented; method considerations will be accounted for, before the results are presented. The results will be presented according to male and female vulnerability to suicide. The study concludes with a general discussion of what has emerged, and how the data are understood in light of theory of culture and masculinity.

There have been done a number of limitations during the interviews and the analysis. The choice of focusing on culture and gender gave consequences for the thematic selection made from the interviews, and for the analysis. Even though I will account for many precipitators for suicide that are present in the context of the study, the analytical tools will be restricted to cultural and gender theories, with an emphasis on masculinity. Several studies from East Africa have discussed `masculinities in crisis` (Dolan, 2002; Kizza, 2012; Stern, 2011). In this paper I will focus on theories of masculinity, and later discuss how expectations related to male stereotypes influences both men and women.

When discussing male maladaptive behaviour succeeding war experiences, trauma will probably be one of the main causes. However, this is this will not be subject to discussion in this study. Also when discussing culture, limiting considerations have been made. There are many cultural classifications that could have been made, and that contributes to some people being marginalized. Ethnicity, age, level of education are a few examples of other ways of classifying.

2 Literature review

To get an overview of previous studies done in the region on attitude towards suicide, and suicide in relation to gender, masculinity, war and culture, I started by searching PubMed, Google Scholar and Amazon with the following words: "Sudan" and "suicide", and then combined the terms with "attitude", "gender", "war", "mental health" and "conflict (psychology)". "Sudan" would suggest studies done both in South Sudan and Sudan, as South Sudan was separated from Sudan as late as 2011 and research done in Sudan before that time may have included what is today South Sudan. I also did a search on Sudan Open Archive with the search word "suicide".

There was also conducted separate research in the two regions before 2011, and when I refer to research done in the southern region of "the old Sudan" (from before 2011) I use the term "Southern Sudan".

Since South Sudan culturally have much in common with the neighbouring countries, most of them with comparable histories of war and violence I did similar searches from Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda and Africa. Interestingly, no publications on suicide from CAR and DRC were found.

2.1 Studies on suicide in South Sudan and East Africa

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently released a report stating that about 20 out of 100,000 people in South Sudan ended their life by suicide in 2012. Twice as many men as women killed themselves, and the country has the fourth highest suicide rate in Africa, after Mozambique, Tanzania and Burundi, closely followed by Uganda. This is the first report of its kind. Earlier, research on suicide on the African continent has not been a prioritized area, although there has been conducted some studies on suicide in the region. There have even been done a few studies on suicide in Sudan and South Sudan, and there are plenty of stories in South Sudanese media about people committing suicide (Bubenzer & Stern, 2011; Dak, 2008; Nakimangole, 2013).

Between 1971 and 1975 10 cases of suicide and 90 cases of attempted suicide were reported to the police in Khartoum Province in Sudan, but since suicide is an offence under the Sudan penal code underreporting is likely. The study noted socio-economic stress and family problems as the most common causes (Hafeiz & Nadim, 1978). Goldney et al (1998) later found a relatively high degree of suicide ideation among two Sudanese samples, and in the Khartoum Teaching Hospital reported at least 20 cases of suspected suicide were brought in every month. A volunteer in Khartoum reported that: "it

is uncommon to find young Sudanese women who do not know, or who have not heard of, someone who has at least attempted suicide" (Goldney, Harris, Badri, Michael, & Fisher, 1998 p 157).

In a survey conducted in South Darfur in January 2015 where one woman in every household of a sample of 1293 households were interviewed, five per cent of the respondents reported suicidal ideation, and two per cent reported suicide attempts. Also, two per cent of the households had a member that committed suicide during the past year (Kim, Torbay, & Lawry, 2007).

Several studies demonstrate high rates of suicide in nearby, similar areas in Uganda (Goldney et al., 1998; Kim et al., 2007; Kizza, 2012; Mugisha, Knizek, Kinyanda, & Hjelmeland, 2011). Rates of suicides appear to have increased in Uganda in line with social changes and continued events that threaten the physical and emotional integrity of the population (Ovuga & Boardman, 2009a)

2.2 Suicide and gender

Suicide death is strikingly a male phenomenon (Möller-Leimkühler, 2003), and WHO estimates that in South Sudan twice as many men than women die from suicide (WHO, 2014). Suicide rates in most countries are higher among men than women. Several countries also experience that male suicide rates increase, while suicide rates of females decline. This might have to do with differences in the development of social factors contributing to both causal and protective factors in the two genders, especially linked to changes in gender roles. In contrast to suicides, rates of deliberate self-harm are usually higher in females than males (Hawton, 2000).

2.2.1 Masculinity

Given that males are more vulnerable to suicide than women, I have chosen to focus mainly on gender theories on masculinities, and will briefly refer to a few studies on masculinity conducted in sub-Saharan Africa.

Firstly, based on reports from different countries in sub-Saharan Africa Barker & Ricardo (2005) have studied how masculinity is constructed. They found that both men and women are made vulnerable by rigid notions of manhood and gender hierarchies. Men suffer under cultural expectations of being able to provide both for their family and their extended family. As many face unemployment, many men describe themselves as being trapped in youth, as they are not considered men before they are married and have children. Many men reports that this leads to a feeling of demasculinization. When women

enters the labour marked men´s economic advantage relative to women start to erode which ads to the frustration among men (Barker & Ricardo, 2005).

Secondly, Dolan (2002) has conducted a case study of weak and collapsing masculinities among the Acholis of Northern Uganda. He finds that when the idea of masculinity is played out in a context of violence, the possibility of developing alternative masculinities collapses. To be recognized as an adult, men are expected to become husbands and fathers, and he remains a `boy` until he is married. A married man is expected to provide for the material needs of a wife and children, and to provide physical protection for his family. Prior to the war many families held their wealth in the form of cattle, but this source has largely been wiped out. Education opportunities have also become limited during times of war, and have lessened the possibilities for jobs and income for the youth. The absence of cattle or cash for bride wealth contributes to the difficult situation for young men. The frustration and humiliation felt by the men that are unable to live up to their own and the society's expectations of masculinity sometimes turns to violent behaviour including self-harm (Dolan, 2002).

Leatherman (2011) has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of contemporary armed conflicts, with several case studies from sub Saharan Africa. She finds that traditional masculine values calls for men to fight and/or to be killed. Those who refuse runs the risk of being feminized, labelled homosexual and become potential targets of rape, castration and death in war. She finds that when war or natural disasters destroy and change the institutional supports of "noncatastrophic masculinities", "hyper-masculiity" elevates. Hyper-masculinity is seen as an exaggerated male type drawing on dominance, toughness, aggression, and violence (Leatherman, 2011).

Lastly Kizza (2012) conducted a qualitative autopsy study on suicide in post conflict Uganda among the Acholi, and found that lost dignity, loss of hope and family responsibilities were among the reasons reported for men that had died by suicide. For the having women no control was perceived as a reason for suicide, and the tension created as women fought for their rights added to the stress for women (Kizza, 2012).

2.3 Suicide and war

Durkheim found that suicide rates fall during war, and argued that this has to do with the increased level of social integration in war-times (Durkheim, 1978; Lester, 2009b). The strong association between war and falling suicide rates has later been confirmed by other studies, and explained with the theory on social integration. Others have argued that unemployment influences the suicide rate more than war, and

suggested that the increase of employment in the army and the war industry is a better explanation for the decline of suicide rates during war (Lester, 2009b).

Whether the suicide rate really decrease during war has been debated, as one can expect less registration and documentation of suicide during times of war than in times of peace. However, Mehlum (1999) argues that the overall effect of war in the long term will increase the suicide rate among those who have been directly affected (Mehlum, 1999).

2.3.1 War as an indirect factor contributing to suicide

We have seen that there are different views on how war affects the prevalence of suicide. As mentioned above some claim that there is a stronger coherence between suicide and unemployment, which can explain why suicide rates actually decline during most wars (Durkheim, 1978; Lester, 2009b). In the coming section precipitators for suicide that can be found in South Sudan will be presented. Again we must question whether these precipitators are in fact linked to poverty and unemployment, but in any case we may state that that war is a main contributor to keeping the country in poverty. Furthermore, the different periods of war have lead to the collapse of health services, law and protection and infrastructure to ensure distribution of food etc. in South Sudan (Horjen, 2014).

Populations that experience armed conflict and forced migration have a high prevalence of mental illnesses, in particular, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Ameresekere & Henderson, 2012b; Karunakara et al., 2004; Kinyanda et al., 2013). Most South Sudanese have been exposed to traumatic and dangerous experiences associated with forced migration, including loss of family members, torture rape and starvation (Ameresekere & Henderson, 2012a; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008; Marlowe, 2010; Tempany, 2009). Several studies on mental health in Southern Sudan/South Sudan show high prevalence of depression and PTSD (Ayazi, Lien, Eide, Ruom, & Hauff, 2012; Karunakara et al., 2004; Neuner et al., 2004; B. Roberts, E. Y. Damundu, O. Lomoro, & E. Sondorp, 2009b; Roberts, Damundu, Lomoro, & Sondorp, 2010). People with poor mental health and who are exposed to substantial distress may be more vulnerable to suicidality (B. Roberts, E. Damundu, O. Lomoro, & E. Sondorp, 2009a; WHO, 2014).

Armed conflicts increase transmission of HIV/AIDS, and this is associated with suicidality both directly and indirectly (Kinyanda, Hoskins, Nakku, Nawaz, & Patel, 2012). In 2012 it was estimated that 153,000 people were living with HIV/AIDS in South Sudan (CIA, 2014), and the number of affected is considered to be on the raise. The many reports of sexual violence against women in South Sudan (Tankink & Richters, 2007) and the lack of health services contributes to the high numbers.

Since the war many South Sudanese have developed an alcohol and substance abuse (D´Awol, 2011), which gives an increased risk of suicide as it may lead to poor mental health, lack of social support and financial difficulties (Rossow, 2001). Alcohol and drugs are also often used as `self-medication` when struggling with untreated depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress (Ameresekere & Henderson, 2012b). Being intoxicated can also amplify an already depressed mood and reduce impulse control, consequently making the road to self- harm shorter (Rossow, 2001).

It is known that easy accesses to a means of suicide can make the difference to whether a person completes a suicide or not (WHO, 2014). In South Sudan there is an easy access to firearms and pesticides. A war-torn country like Sudan/South Sudan would have little resources to regulate pesticides, and a reported method of suicide in Sudan is Paraphenylene diamine (PPD), which is used as a hair dye and mixed with henna for decorating hands and feet. Its pure form is available in the local markets, and its toxic effect is well known. In a hospital in Khartoum alone an average of 287 cases of poisoning expected to be suicide attempts is seen yearly (Abdelraheem, Ali, Hussien, & Zijlstra, 2011).

2.4 Suicide and poverty

Honkasalo & Tuominen (2014) refers to current studies from Europe and North America that shows a correlation between low socioeconomic position and suicide. This, they argue, suggests that suicide must be studied as a social phenomenon resulting from inequality and poverty (Honkasalo & Tuominen, 2014). Poverty fosters many of the same challenges as was accounted for under the section were precipitators related to war.

3 The study context: South Sudan

To contextualise this study I will briefly outline some general features about South Sudan.
Firstly, South Sudan is the youngest nation in the world and gained it´s independence in 2011 after Southern Sudanese voted for separation by 98,83 per cent (LeRiche & Arnold, 2012). The country has around 11,5 million inhabitants, with almost 46 per cent being under the age of 14 (CIA, 2014).

3.1 Historical and political context

South Sudan (while still part of Sudan) went through two civil wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005) before independence was achieved in 2011(Bubenzer & Stern, 2011; LeRiche & Arnold, 2012). By then this was the longest lasting war at the African continent (Horjen, 2014). During the last civil war approximately 1,9 million died from violence, disease and starvation, and up to 5 million, more than half of the population, were forcibly displaced from their homes (Roberts et al., 2010; Wanga-Odhiambo, 2013). In mid December 2013 war broke out again, which has led to 1.4 million internally displaced people by violence, and 463.000 have fled to neighbouring countries (UNOCHA, 2014).

The internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the previous war (1983-2005) mainly went to Khartoum in the north, central Sudan or towns in the southern part of the country, while around one million refugees sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Egypt (Roberts et al., 2009a; Wanga-Odhiambo, 2013).

3.2 Socio-economic situation

Extensive use of violence and torture, sexual violence, trafficking (including the use of child soldiers and forced prostitution), burning and looting of property during the war has been well documented (Ayazi et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2009a) . Development has been set back and the general population lacks basic education and infrastructure. Poverty is widespread, most of the population is exposed to trauma due to the long lasting war, and the prevalence of mental disorders is high. There are reports that the cruelty in the current conflict is worse than what has been seen before, probably fuelled by trauma people have suffered from the past decades of war (HRW, 2014).

South Sudan is the country with the highest maternal mortality rate in the world with 2,054 per 100,000 live births, and only 16 per cent of the women can read and write (CIA, 2014). The health and humanitarian situation in South Sudan is grim, and mental health services are absent in most parts of the

country. The only public medical facility treating mental illnesses is Juba Teaching Hospital, with only twelve beds, leaving prisons as the option for keeping mentally ill persons (Singh & Singh, 2014).

3.3 Cultural context: Diversities of ethnicity/tribes

To talk about the people of South Sudanese as one defined ethnic group is problematic. South Sudan has considerable cultural diversity with more than fifty tribes and clans (Stern, 2011), and they have yet not had a nation-building process. With decades of war, and people being forced to seek refuge in other countries, traditional cultural customs and beliefs have been challenged. In the biographical book "What is the what?" the main character, an unaccompanied child refugee during the second civil war, says:

> Sudanese customs were bent and broken at Kakuma [refugee camp in Kenya] with more frequency than they would have been had there been no war, had eighty thousand people not been in a refugee camp run by a progressive-minded international consortium(Eggers, 2007 p. 441).

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This quote summarizes the complexity when it comes to understanding culture in South Sudan. Large proportions of the South Sudanese have at one point been displaced due to war.
Back in the colonial times national borders were established, dividing several ethnic groups. These borders are constantly crossed by traders as well as by people fleeing from drought, political violence and civil wars (Wanga-Odhiambo, 2013). Decades of wars have ravaged the region, with countries politics and conflicts intertwined. For example in 1993 Zaire (today Democratic Republic of Congo), endorsed by USA, started to provide military support to SPLA (Sudan´s People Liberation Army) as part of a regional strategy to destabilize the Sudanese government, leading to a low-scale war between the two countries during the early 90s. The government in Khartoum reciprocated by supporting rebel groups in Uganda and the Rwandan ex-FAR (Forces Armées Rwandaises) (Stearns, 2011). Since the mid 1950s steady streams of refugees have crossed the border between the Sudan and Uganda. First thousands fled the Sudan to escape the first civil war, and they stayed in Uganda until approximately 78,000 refugees returned from northern Uganda. Five years later more than 163,000 northern Ugandans sought refuge in southern Sudan. They returned to their homes between 1986 and 1989, and were accompanied by their Sudanese hosts fleeing an escalation of fighting in the region. Between 1986 and 1994, over 100,000 southern Sudanese refugees crossed the border to Uganda (Karunakara et al., 2004). After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 people started to return to South Sudan. After their many years in exile, many are like strangers to the country (Sommers & Schwartz, 2011).

Although the country has great ethnic diversity, one may still find some common characteristics. In all parts of South Sudan the continuation of the bloodline is crucial, in fact a person can only be understood in relation to his ability to secure the coming generations. Consequently sexual reproduction is critical, and the lack of children is a personal catastrophe for both men and women (Perner, 2001). For the purpose of this paper the term tribe will be used, as I found that the informants consequently used the term tribe when discussing ethnicity within South Sudan. Tribe is here understood as a defined group whose members are duty bound to each other, for some tribes this mean that they are obliged to unite in cattle raiding and defence. The tribe share a name and a system of customary law traditionally administered by the elders, meaning men (Keesing, 1975).

All the tribes in South Sudan are deeply patriarchal and they all practice arranged marriages including paying dowry for the bride, and practise of polygamy is prevalent. Generally girls and women are responsible for the home, while boys and men take care of livestock and fields, provide for and protect the family, and represent in public. Even though women have little saying in public matters they are found to be very strong, and men also fear their women because they will often be protected by their fathers and brothers (Bubenzer & Stern, 2011; Deng, 1972; Perner, 2001; Stern, 2011).

During the civil wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005) women had to take up new roles and in responsibilities previously held by men, as the men were at the frontlines or killed in battle. Often women found themselves as head of the household and this contributed to that South Sudanese women started to break with their customary gender roles (Arabi, 2011; Tankink & Richters, 2007). The Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972 that was followed by 11 years of peace provided for equal citizenship for men and women, and a number of women entered politics. In this period several humanitarian organizations were established in South Sudan, and employed women, contributing to the new opportunities for women (Arabi, 2011; LeRiche & Arnold, 2012)

4 Theoretical approach/background

4.1 Suicide in a cultural perspective

Although suicide is an individual act, it always happens in a cultural context, thus it should also be seen as a collective phenomenon (Mäkinen, 2009). The fact that countries with comparable cultural features have similar suicide rates, and that these levels are relatively constant over time indicates that culture and environment affects the act of suicide (De Leo, 2009; Hawton, 2005; Wexler & Gone, 2012). Suicide is a complex phenomenon that calls for a multivariate explanation. Research on culture is necessary to understand the meaning of the suicidal act (Hjelmeland 2010). How do we explain the statistical stability and its individual unpredictability (Macdonald & Naudin, 2014)?

By looking at suicide in relation to the cultural and social context in which it happens we can gain a deeper understanding of the local meaning and implications of suicidal act rather than just looking at the psychopathology
(Jose M Bertolote, Fleischmann, De Leo, & Wasserman, 2009; Honkasalo & Tuominen, 2014).

We have seen the need for studies on culture in order to get a better understanding of the suicidal act. But how do we understand the term culture? In the coming section some theoretical views on culture will be presented.

4.2 Understanding culture

Culture is a term that is difficult to define, as it in its nature constantly changing (Hjelmeland, 2013). Culture is something that happens between people, it is relational, and changes as it interplays with socio-economic factors (Park, 2013). It is difficult to draw the line between cultures. How can we know where one culture ends and another one begins? What is South Sudan culture? As we have seen above South Sudanese consist of a diversity of cultures that are more or less overlapping (Horjen, 2014). It is important to bear in mind that there are cultural variations within the country when the findings are presented later.

Although understanding culture can help shed light on the suicidal act, it is important not to make people more alike than they really are, as it would be equally wrong to make people more different than they are. Within the same culture, people have much in common; eg language, religion, experience of the world and morality. At the same time there are large variations within a culture. The customs, practices and beliefs that most people take for granted as more or less natural, form the core of a culture,

and multiple cultures will exist side by side and overlapping within a society. Culture is also changing under the influence of new technologies, migration, socio-economic factors and other social changes (Eriksen & Sørheim, 2006). For the purpose of this paper culture is understood as the

> totality of meanings, values and norms that the interacting individuals possess, and the totality of the material communicators that objectifies, socialize and reproduce those meanings (Østerberg, 1994 p 77)

In other words the term culture is used to explain how members of a group come to integrate the same values, norms and social scripts with the help of major institutions in the society.

Norms function as guidelines for behaviour in a given society according to social, cultural and legally acceptable standards. The violation of norms can lead to stigma and sanctions (Leatherman, 2011).

Durkheim has been given the credit for showing how cultural and social factors can help understand suicide as a phenomenon (De Leo, 2009). Why is it that suicide rates vary across different cultures? I will briefly account for some main characteristic of Durkheim´s theory on suicide, before I continue to describe a cultural theory by Berger.

4.2.1 Durkheim

Durkheim´s groundbreaking theory on how variations in suicide rates across Europe could be explained by cultural differences still stands today. He argued that suicide rates are affected by the degree of social integration and social control (Durkheim, 1978). Social integration refers to the interaction that makes people part of a whole, and partly as this state of wholeness (Østerberg, 1994). Furthermore, the individual have to be able to submit to social control the community exercise. Social control is intended to maintain the values and norms that prevail in society, and to ensure that the individual stays within these limits. The individual is also part of the exercise of social control (Bille-Brahe, 2007). With big social changes collective ambivalence may occur about their traditional value system. The member´s of the society can react with psychological distress, called anomie (Park, 2013). Durkheim´s functionalistic theory has later been criticized for putting too much emphasis on the society´s role in determining individual acts. Phenomenology was developed in response to a time where social order was challenged by social movements focusing on individual rights. There was a need for new perspectives and analytical tools (Wallace & Wolf, 1991).

4.2.2 The dialectic proses

Berger developed his theory on culture in the in the 60's in an era of social unrest within the phenomenological tradition. He came to see the reality of everyday life as a constructed system of ideas that have accumulated over time and are taken for granted by members of a group, as opposed to Durkheim´s functionalistic view on the social order (Peter L Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Wallace & Wolf, 1991).

The definition of culture presented in the above section brings out the interaction between the individual and society. Berger emphasizes the individual as a participator in the dialectical interplay between the individual and society. In his opinion, it is not only the society that shapes the individual, but also the individual that shapes the society. The external and objective is imbedded in the inner life of the individual through socialization and accordingly the individual is shaped by the objective world through internal identification. In her consciousness she incorporates repertoires of roles and identity learned from her parents and authority figures or by normative institutions (Peter L Berger, 1974)

Berger emphasizes what he calls the cultural production of meaning. Humans are both creating culture and interpreting culture. The aspect of meaning is the essential, both when culture is being produced consciously and when it is produced unconsciously. He saw meaning as the most basic of all needs, and the feeling of meaninglessness as the worst of all stresses (Peter L Berger, 1974).

Durkheim saw social integration and social control as important forces regulating the inhabitants of a society, and he saw these mechanisms related to a system of meaning, often being a religious system, hence serving as a glue in the society (Durkheim, 1978; McGuire, 2008), but there is a variety of ways to understand culture. Berger (1993) explains culture as a dialectical process between the individual and society were the external and objective is internalized in the individual through socialization and integration, and the society depends on the individual as producer of objectified reality (Peter L Berger, 1974; McGuire, 2008).

How can it be that our world order at large is accepted as it is? Why are not more people protesting against structural inequality? Bourdieu (2000) calls this the “paradox of doxa”. Doxa is used to describe those aspects of culture and society that most people take for granted, that they find no reason to question. Why is the symbolic order of the world broadly respected, even by those who are most disadvantaged by it? In Bourdieu´s view gender inequality provides an especially rich example of this paradox (Bourdieu, 2000).

In the next section I account for a few views on gender theory, and explore how gender theories can serve as analytical tools for understanding the way cultural features are maintained. This is especially relevant when it comes to suicide, as the statistics globally as well as in South Sudan, shows clear differences between the sexes. There is evidence that men are more vulnerable to suicide, and therefor a need to understand masculinity (Möller-Leimkühler, 2003; WHO, 2014). Möller-Leimkühler (2003) argues that the gender perspective offers a useful analytical tool for understanding male vulnerability to suicide, in that it integrates both structural and cultural factors (Möller-Leimkühler, 2003). In the following section I will account for gender theories relevant to the discussion later, with emphasis on theories on masculinities.

4.3 Gender theory

For the purpose of this paper gender refers to the socially constructed roles for men and women that implies different social norms and cultural expectations, as opposed to sex, which refers to biological differences (Cleaver, 2002; Möller-Leimkühler, 2003). These norms and expectations are reproduced through early socialization and through institutions within the society. The gender roles function as scripts for the individual and continue to develop in interaction with and understanding of cultural scenarios. The script is significant for "self-definition, self-evaluation and self-regulation" (Möller-Leimkühler, 2003 p 2). Through this on-going socialization the individual internalise norms and values preferred in the society, and develops an identity that is constantly adjusted and regulated according to feedback and sanctions from other inhabitants. This personal understanding of cultural defined roles helps us understand the context of social change (Cohler & Smith, 2006).

4.3.1 Masculinity

Masculinity is an analytical term that has to do with a role available for men (and in some cases women) to play out. The expectation to and content of masculinities varies from culture to culture, and must be understood in the specific cultural context including time and place (Lorentzen, 2011). Masculinity is here understood in the context of a patrilineal society, organised around families built from heterosexual relations.

Most studies of gender issues have been preoccupied with men´s power. However, as much as this view can be justified from a structural point of view, most men in the world actually don´t feel very powerful, argues Lorentzen (2011). There is a need to look at masculinity in a more complex way, including also an individual and more emotional perspective. Bearing in mind the need also to apply a cultural sensitive approach he suggests employing the dynamic relationship between manliness and

unmanliness. This captures the continuous struggle for men to fulfil the cultural understanding of manliness, as they avoid the danger of being emasculated. This also maintains the dynamic aspect of the male gender role in relation to culture, social changes and in relation to women. For example when seeing how threatening it is for men to be feminized it says something about the low status for women at the same time (Lorentzen, 2011).

Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner (1994) criticises the view that everyone is oppressed by sexism, and referrers to Freire´s definition on oppression; that for one group to be oppressed, there must be an oppressor group. They are not denying that men also suffer from stereotyped gender-roles, but argue that it should rather be seen as a cost of being on top. They argue for the need to examine the way social class, ethnicity and sexuality interacts with roles of gender. Men in power can portray themselves as sensitive and show feelings in public without risk loosing their power, while men who are relatively powerless tend to overplay a masculine stereotyped role (Hondagneu-sotelo & Messner, 1994).

The role as the provider is found to be very strong across cultures, and the resistance to change this role can have to do with the fear of being seen as unmanly (Lorentzen, 2011). The roles of being powerful, a warrior and a protector is also strongly associated with masculinity in most cultures (Leatherman, 2011). Traditional societies are often organized around concepts of honour, and identity is linked to the past through the "reiterated performance of prototypical acts" (Peter Ludwig Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1974 p 91).

The masculine dominance

Why do men *and* women generally accept a symbolic order that renders gender differences natural and eternal, and thereby justifies men's domination over women? To better understand the reproduction of gender differences Bourdieu suggests that we need to identify the historical mechanisms that accomplish "dehistoricization" and "eternalization" of sexual differences, and he argues that institutions plays a key role in reproducing inequality. The family as an institution reproduces gender differences, but also religious institutions, schools and the state are involved in the process of reproducing the masculine domination.

Drawing on ethnographic data from the Berbers, Bourdieu found that men and women did not have to be intentionally socialized to think and act according to defined gender roles; but rather the gendered system war reproduced automatically as an effect of a physical and social order organized in accordance with the androcentric principle. The division and inequality of the sexes appeared completely natural and taken for granted and served as an organizing principle of the society. The objectification in the

physical and social order, and its embodiment in gendered dispositions served as legitimation of gender difference and inequality as both natural and eternal. The objective structures of the social space shape individual dispositions, and people acting and choosing on the basis of these dispositions in turn reinforce the gendered social order. This account of gender difference and inequality differs from approaches that explain gender oppression as a conscious power play (Bourdieu, 2000), and contributes to the understanding of why changing gender roles proves difficult.

Hegemonic model of masculinity

A hegemonic model of masculinity seeks do explain the sociocultural dynamic through which a dominant group maintains a privileged social position. This model supports a social practice of masculine dominance over women and other marginalized men (Dolan, 2002; Moffatt, 2012). While masculinity is sees as created in *contrast to* femininity, it is like a zero-sum game between men, meaning that one man´s loss of power is another man´s gain in power. Dolan (2002) argues that it is necessary do make a distinction between the lived experiences of masculinities and their lived expectation of masculinities. It is not necessary the same. The model is maintained in that men are taught to aspire for it and to judge themselves and others by it, and these dynamics are also built in to the state and society at large (Dolan, 2002).

Violence as a way of performing masculinity

One way of performing masculinity is through violence (Leatherman, 2011), and as war restrict the leeway for men to be recognized as men some men turn to armed forces as a means to achieve manhood.

Collective violence and violent coaching

Collective violence can occur when particular circumstances takes place. By analysing historic episodes of collective violence and comparing for similarities World Health Organization (WHO) was able to extract political, economical, societal, community and demographic risk factors (Bond, 2007; WHO, 2002). WHO defines collective violence as:

> "the instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group – whether this group is transitory or has a more permanent identity – against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives" (WHO, 2002 p 1).

Bond (2007) discusses what makes it possible for `collective violence` to happen. He finds that both circumstances and culture plays it´s part, and argues that culture must be understood as a "negotiated

response to those very circumstances". While difficult circumstances potentiate collective violence, it is not determining. Consequently there must be some values, attitudes and expectations within the culture that allows the community to respond to difficulties with collective violence (Bond, 2007). Leatherman is arguing in line with this when she finds that rootcause of sexual violence in war lie in the prevalence of pre-existing gender based violence in the society (Leatherman, 2011 p 145).

4.4 Research question

We have seen that suicide is considered a public health problem in South Sudan, and that twice as many men than women die by suicide (WHO, 2014). We have seen how war contributes to poverty and how this creates a backdrop of precipitators for suicide. Cultural theories suggest explanations on how people are affected when their traditional institutions are weakened and fail to offer meaning to people. Consequently the research question was formulated to be:

What are South Sudanese's understandings of suicide in relation to gender roles?
And the sub question is:
How does the socio-economic environment affect gender roles in terms of vulnerability for suicide?

5 Methodology

5.1 Choice of methodological approach

Since the purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of suicide according to people in South Sudan, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Qualitative methods seeks to explore social phenomena according to the meaning people bring to them (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997), and can be used to systematize and provide insight into human expression (De Nasjonale Forskningsetiske Komiteer, 2006). The aim of the study is to understand and document the world seen from the informants´ point of view (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Unlike quantitative method that focuses on the distribution, number and amount (Wadel, 1991), qualitative methods allow a legitimate diversity of opinions (Kvale, 1997), and aim for a deeper understanding (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997). Qualitative method is best suited for understanding the meaning of suicide in a specific sociocultural context (Hjelmeland, 2010).

5.2 Interview guide

An interview guide was developed with a few open questions, inviting the informants to elaborate on the topic the way they wanted (See Appendix). Since the purpose of the study was to understand a little known phenomenon, semi-structured interview was chosen allowing adjustments to the interview guide over time (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). The semi-structural interview is similar to an everyday conversation, but has a structure that makes sure that the appropriate topic and themes are covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 1997).

A semi-structured interview also gives the possibility of more informant-driven data, and bottom-up informed data in line with phenomenological thinking (Malterud, 2006). The fact that the interview guide had so few questions, gave room for improvisation and made the interview a little more like a conversation. The informants were given the opportunity to speak freely and in long stretches. This gave the advantage of opening up to new and unexpected knowledge, which in turn formed the basis for new issues and adjustments along the way (De Najonale Forskningsetiske Komiteer, 2006). This gave a richer and more informant-driven data sample, but gave some challenges later when analysing the data.

5.3 Qualitative interviews

The purpose of the qualitative research interview is learn about a topic from the informant's own point of view, and how their experience of the world is independent of scientific theories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 1997). Qualitative interviews have the opportunity to go more in depth rather than skim the surface (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997). And to study a phenomenon on the basis of the opinions informant attributes to it. And it allows and encourages complexity, contradictions and ambivalence expressed in an interview.

In general it is best to ask open questions that allows the informants to reflect and associate meaning in their own way. But according to Riessman (2008) more importantly than the wordings of the questions are the attentiveness and engagement of the interviewer (Riessman, 2008)

5.3.1 Pre-understanding and pre-knowledge

Before proceeding to the interviews, it is important to clarify prejudices and pre-understanding (Neumann & Neumann, 2012). To prepare for the interviews I read general literature on South Sudan; biographies, history, political analysis and articles about mental health in South Sudan, Sudan, and from the diaspora. I also talked with South Sudanese and others who have lived and worked in South Sudan / Sudan about their impressions of suicide issues and mental health. I reflected on my own background: I had lived in southern Sudan as a child until I was evacuated with my family in 1985. This would be my first return to the country, almost 30 years later.

5.4 Informants

The data consist of seven recorded interviews, including five men and three women from five different ethnic groups. They were all between 30 and 40, four of them had education at university level, and two had not finished primary school.

5.4.1 Inclusion criteria

The main inclusion criteria was that the informant should be South Sudanese who had lived in the country. However, due to sudden change in the security situation in South Sudan, the interviews were conducted in Kampala and Nairobi. All but one of the interviewees had their home in South Sudan, but was currently out of the country because of ongoing studies in neighbouring countries or because they had just travelled out due to the outbreak of fighting mid-December 2013. Another important inclusion criteria was that the informants could be interviewed in English.

5.4.2 Recruiting

I established contact with University of Juba during the fall of 2013. The plan was to recruit informants through the University. I wanted the study to be rooted in South Sudan, and to have a South Sudanese co- supervisor. I had meetings at the University, got my research permit, and made plans for my return in January and who and how to recruit informants. I managed to do one interview before I had to return to Nairobi. Unfortunately, the war broke out again shortly after (15 December 2013), and I had to rethink the strategy.

The fighting started in Juba one week after my departure. For a long time I waited for the fighting to stop so that it would be possible for me to conduct the scheduled interviews in Juba. I had regular contact with the University of Juba and the Norwegian Embassy to assess the situation. When I finally realized I that it would not be possible for me to return to Juba, I started working on obtaining new contacts in Nairobi. I was optimistic because I had good contacts that were eager to help. I wanted to recruit South Sudanese who currently stayed in Nairobi, but who had recently lived in South Sudan. Again, weeks passed, and it was difficult to get the desires responses. A Kenyan acquaintance who helped me contact South Sudanese in Nairobi experienced several times that people were offended by the request. I was very aware that people may be offended by being asked to be interviewed about suicide when they were in shock over new brutal fighting in their homeland. In fact I met with several South Sudanese in this period that I didn´t find it ethically justifiable to interview because they were in active grief over newly lost family members.

When I finally got the opportunity to interview people they did not seem to have any problems talking about the topic, and several of them encouraged me to interview more people. I got the impression that they thought it was a relevant and interesting topic and that they appreciated that I showed interest in South Sudan.

Despite the difficulties, I managed to do 7 interviews, but I ended up having to fly to Kampala to make four of them. Given the situation I had to accept the informants I could get. Ideally I would have preferred to have a wider range in age and ethnicity to get a greater variety in the information.

5.4.3 Data collection procedure and interview setting

One interview was conducted in Juba the first week of December 2013, while the rest of the interviews were conducted between 8th of Januray and 2nd of February in Nairobi and Kampala. Each interview lasted from about 50 minutes to one and a half hours.

I tried to create a safe atmosphere so that the informants would feel free to share, without feeling pressured or invaded (Malterud, 2006), especially considering that this could be a sensitive and taboo subject to talk about. The participant's need for distance and closeness should determine where the interview takes place (De Nasjonale Forskningsetiske Komiteer, 2006). Consequently I let the informants choose were to meet. The two interviews done in Nairobi were recorded in my house during daytime and when I was the only one home. Two interviews were conducted in a hotel room in Kampala, one in a hotel lobby in Kampala, one interview was done in the private home of an informant in Kampala and one in a friends private home in Juba.

All informants were properly informed about suicide being the theme for the interviews. I explained that the World Health Organization (WHO) regards suicide as a public health problem and estimate that there are about a million people who take their lives each year worldwide. I further explained to them that currently there exists very little data from Africa.

With horrible news and rumour of the violence going on, one can imagine that South Sudanese were in a state of devastation and great sadness. This set a special frame around the study and probably influenced the interviews. Thus, I initiated all the interviews by acknowledging all the hardships South Sudanese have been through and asked about the current situation in South Sudan. The purpose of this was to show sympathy in a particularly difficult situation and to let the informants ear out what was foremost in their mind. My impression is that this "small-talk" where we shared our worries about the current situation contributed in creating a safe and friendly room for further dialog. In several of the interviews, we came back to the political situation, referring to what we had talked about before the interviews started.

Although there are some obstacles related to the interviewer coming from a different culture than the informants (which I will come back to under section 4.5), there could also be some advantages according to Wadel (1991) there could also be some advantages. He claims that it is a human feature to want to explain to someone who does not know much of the topic when that person shows interest in learning more. As a researcher from another culture I could adopt an ***apprentice role***. It was not expected that I knew a lot about how South Sudanese thinks about suicide, and I could therefore ask

"naive" questions, questions that one from the same culture would be expected to know. In that way the informants were enabled to think more deeply about their own practices and attitudes to convey this in an understandable way for me (Wadel, 1991).

According to Riessman (2008) creating possibilities in the research interview means giving up control, and it can sometimes shift the power in the interview situation. Power-sharing can give valuable new discoveries (Riessman, 2008). During the interview process I often said as little as possible and used encouraging words like "tell me more" and the like, to let the informant follow her or his own path. When I was unsure if I had understood correctly I asked the informants to make sure that I got the intended message. Sometimes one story made the informant associate with another, and I the asked about this connection to explore the meaning that connected the stories.

Reflexivity is to give room for doubts along the way, and to question the approach and conclusions along the way. It is an active attitude one must work to maintain. It is important to ask critical questions to what we find and the way it is done. Questions about the validity presuppose that there is consistency between the research questions, theory, data and methods (Malterud, 2006).

5.4.4 Presentation of the informants

The informants are listed in the order that I interviewed them. To keep the confidentiality the names of the participants have been changed.

Name	sex	Age	Education	Tribe	Home
Edith	Female	>35	Primary	Kuku	Juba
Tapoi	Male	<35	Master	Zande	Juba/ Kampala
Zereda	Female	>40	Bachelor	Zande	Yambio/ Kampala
Gangura	Male	<35	Bachelor	Zande	Yambio/ Kampala
Okot	Male	>40	Primary	Acholi	Kampala
Esther	Female	<35	Master	Bari	Juba/ Kampala
Deng	Male	<40	Primary	Dinka	Nairobi

They have all been living away from South Sudan for parts or most of their lives, but they have all been living in East Africa their whole lives. All the tribes represented are Nilotic except from Zande that is Bantu. The Nilotic tribes (especially Dinka, Nuer) have constituted the core of the rebel army (Hutchinson, 2005). The traditional Zande homeland is today divided by borders set by colonial powers, and the Azande ended up living in todays South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Evans-Pritchard, 1976). The Acholiland stretches across Uganda and South Sudan, and are the same people as the Luo of Kenya (Rodriguez & Initiative, 2004).

The informants were recruited through friends and contacts. One was recruited through a Kenyan who knows many South Sudanese because he used to work in South Sudan earlier, one through a contact at Juba University. Four were recruited by Norwegians who have been working for the Embassy or Norwegian aid organizations, and the last was recruited through another informant.

5.5 Transcription

To process the raw data for thematic analysis the norm is to produce verbatim transcripts (Guest et al., 2011). Because the emphasis is on what is being told the language is seen as an asset, not a subject for interpretation itself. It means that "messy language" (cough, repetition, incorrect grammar) can be corrected to make the quotes more reader friendly (Riessman, 2008).

Although I am familiar with "South Sudan-English", differences in language and culture created some barriers. Several times in the transcription process, I felt the need to ask follow-up questions to clarify the meaning of statements. Originally I had planned to do to rounds of interviews with each informant for that reason, but due to delays caused by war I didn´t have the time or resources to do so. English was a second language for all of us, and it can often make formulations less precise. Sometimes I had to use many words to explain what I meant by my questions, other times it was not necessary. In addition, coming from different cultural backgrounds we could be reading different meaning into statements and words. For example one word often used to explain peoples response to life crisis was `stress`, according to Ovuga & Boardman (2009) in Uganda the word ´stress´ is being used as a label for mental disorder (Ovuga & Boardman, 2009a).

5.6 Ethical consideration

There are several ethical considerations that must be made when doing a qualitative study on a sensitive subject like suicide. Mugisha et al (2011) argues that there is a special need for culturally sensitive methods when studying suicide in developing countries. In line with what they suggest I started the initial phase by exploring and understanding values and norms relevant to the study and to get a general overview of South Sudan culturally, socioeconomic and historically. Gatekeepers are understood as people that can provide access to the research field both directly and indirectly (Mugisha et al., 2011). In addition to reading literature about South Sudan, I also had conversations with several South Sudanese that advised me on how to approach the subject. Among the gatekeepers that helped me access the field was an employee at Juba University, one from the Ministry of Health in Juba, one with long field experience as a social worker, currently working for the Norwegian Embassy, one working for a Norwegian NGO, and several others who had worked with NGOs in South Sudan. I asked them about which terminology to use, what taboos to be aware of etc. This knowledge gave me an indirect access to the field as it prepared me on how to approach the issues around suicide in a culturally sensitive way. I also used gatekeepers to recruit informants. This had the advantage that the sensitive topic was introduced by someone they knew hopefully making it easier both to accept to consider talking about it, and also to feel free to say no. With limited time and resources I depended completely on gatekeepers to open these doors for me. Without them I would probably have to spend a long time building relationships before I could get the same kind of openness and willingness to share. Being "a friend of a friend" gave a good starting point for the interviews.

When I was ready to start interviewing I tried to create an atmosphere of confidence among us. Before the I started asking questions about suicide, we talked about South Sudan in more general terms, and thus letting the conversation develop gradually towards more sensitive issues (Mugisha et al., 2011). All though they had already agreed to be interviewed about suicide, I informed them that they at any point could withdraw from the interview making sure that the participation was voluntary (Mugisha et al., 2011).

Collection of data is an intervention, and when asking questions that the informant may not have thought about before, it can give rise to emotional reactions (Malterud, 2006). I spent time talking with each of the interviewees about how they felt about talking about this topic and also about other things before I started to record. During the interviews I was aware of the language and phrases used by the informants, and tried to apply this vocabulary myself (Mugisha et al., 2011). For example I experienced that my expression "ethnical group" only created confusion during interviews, and I switched to using the term "tribe" as they did themselves.

5.6.1 Consent

All interviewees signed informed consent (see appendix). There are strict requirements that consent is sufficiently informed (Malterud, 2006). Most chose to read the leaflet on consent themselves, but to be sure that the content was properly understood, I repeated the main points orally in simple terms. Everyone got my email address and local phone number in case they would withdraw anything from the interview. No one made use of this possibility.

5.6.2 Research permission

I first applied for ethical approval for the study from the Norwegian Regional Ethical Committee (REK), and got the reply that I didn´t need an approval from REK for this kind of research and that it was sufficient to register with the Norwegian Science Data Services (NSD). This was done (se appendix). A research permit for the study was also provided by the Ministry of Higher Education in South Sudan.

5.7 Analyse

The analysis is carried out in line with the hermeneutic and phenomenological tradition.
According to hermeneutic tradition the interpretation of meaning is central, and an emphasis is put on the pre-knowledge of the themes that are present in the text, and the dynamic between the text and the question asked (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). To be able to understand the meaning of a statement it is important to see the statement in the particular context within the interview, but also in relation to the larger context as described earlier. In phenomenological research it is the participant´s perceptions, feelings and lived experiences that informs and directs the object of study (Guest et al., 2011), and as a consequence I adjusted my pre-understandings many times during the interview process. The data given by the informants informed the choice of thematic analysis and in this way ensured a bottom-up approach, rather than one led by preconceptions.

5.7.1 Thematic analyse

Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest et al., 2011). Identifying themes and applying codes to chunks of text require interpretation and reliability must therefor be carefully considered throughout the analytic process. The benefit of this analysis is that it makes it possible to capture the complexity of meaning within the data (Guest et al., 2011), which makes this analytical tool suitable for this study in order to answer the research question.

I started the process by reading the entire transcription from each interviews several times to search for patterns and themes while taking notes. Working with one interview at the time, I "cleaned up" the transcript so that the meanings of relevant episodes were isolated, searching for thematic meanings. After that was done I read the transcripts again to identify patterns and started the coding process of these (Riessman, 2008). I noticed stories about suicides and what meaning they gave to those incidences, and deriving from that I was able to identify relevant themes. Then I looked for similarities and differences, taking notes of possible categories and reflection around those categories. In this way I achieved a growing awareness of the material, and continued to develop a set of codes deriving from the themes. Codes represent a greater level of abstraction than themes, and are developed for the purpose of analysis. The codes reflected the observed meaning in the text, and was systematically sorted into categories and relationships of meaning (Guest et al., 2011).

In order to apply the codes to the text, I marked statements in all interview texts with different colours according to the codes. Since the informants were encouraged to talk and elaborate freely, there was a broad range of themes present in the data. However, in order to achieve the goal of connecting accounts from interviews with theories of social change processes I had to narrow down the themes (Riessman, 2008). I systematically reviewed the grouped codes to look for consistency of certain themes in the data, i.e. that the themes were consistent and appeared with some frequency in all the interview texts. Particular cases were then selected to illustrate general patterns or themes, and with the help of theory to be linked with social change process (Riessman, 2008).

This process has been circular in the sense that the analysis have continuously alternated between data and theory, and through the processing of the data, I have chosen theoretical perspective based on the findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

5.8 Validity and reliability

The terms validity and reliability are used across different research disciplines, although some argues that because these terms was developed within the quantitative tradition, other terms should be used in qualitative research. Validity can be replaced by credibility, which refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings, also emphasizing the role of the context. Reliability can be replaced by dependability which refers to the consistency of the research process (Guest et al., 2011)

When there is found a correlation between self-reports and *other sources* it strengthens the validity (Riessman, 2008). I found that there was a strong correlation between what the informants said in this

study and what others have reported in earlier studies. To some extent these connections will be made under section 6 where the findings will be discussed.

This study has a small sample size based on qualitative interviews from South Sudanese representing different ethnical groups and can not easily be generalized to the whole diverse population (Mugisha et al., 2011). However the context-dependent information that derives from qualitative interviews can help develop a field. The complexity and some times contradictive stories emerging from the interviews can hive valuable insights to a topic. The purpose has not been to find cases that could represent statistically, but to explore how meaning can be created. Themes might have similar meanings across narratives, and by collecting different narratives thematic categories can be generated across individuals (Riessman, 2008).

6 Findings and discussion

When applying thematic analysis gender merged as a prominent theme among the informants associated with suicide. Most of them thought that there were more men than women that died by suicide which corresponds with the latest findings from WHO. Bear in mind that when the interviews were conducted, neither the interviewer nor the participants in the study knew if there were more men than women that died by suicide in South Sudan. The estimated rate on suicide was released in September 2014 (WHO, 2014).

Firstly a few quotes will be presented that can give an impression of whether suicide is a public health problem in South Sudan according to the informants. Secondly the findings regarding gender differences associated with suicidality are presented under three broad themes; firstly, the challenges associated by being a man, secondly the challenges associated by being a woman and finally the difference in coping strategies for men and women. All of these themes have sub-themes. However, it should be noted that the themes are often dependent on each other, are interlinked in different ways and will be discussed together.

In all the interviews I started by asking "Have you ever heard of suicide in South Sudan?" This question gave room for many stories about suicide incidents that the informants knew about, and it also showed that this is the kind of stories that people share among each other.

It turned out that all the informants had personally known someone who had died by suicide, being a relative, close friend, colleague or neighbour. As shown in the methodology section, this was not part of the inclusion criteria. However, it is not possible to draw any conclusion from my limited sample on whether this was a coincidence or if it reflects the magnitude of the problem.

Nevertheless, when I started to count all the different suicide cases each of them told, it turned out that they all had witnessed or heard of ten cases or more. Most of them emphasised that suicide was not a wide spread problem in South Sudan. They saw it as a problem that should be taken seriously, but as Gangura put it

> Gangura: In Africa it happens, but not like the way it happens in the western world.

Deng was of the opposite opinion. In his view suicide is a major problem in South Sudan. An explanation for this can be that he has a life story that probably made him more exposed to the extremities of war. Many Dinka boys became what were later labelled "lost boys": Displaced by war,

thousands of Sudanese boys acquired this label by walking huge distances without their parents. Around 60 per cent of the boys survived wild animals, hunger, thirst, sickness and conflict around four years in refugee camps in Ethiopia before they were forced to move again, to Kenya´s Kakuma refugee camp in 1992 (Cohler & Smith, 2006; Marlowe, 2010). Deng started to walk to Ethiopia at the age of seven, and ended up in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. He starts to talk about suicide with the following statement:

> Deng: Those who were closer to me, who, if I was allowed I could bring their names, I think they can reach twenty, if not thirty.

When Tapoi and I first started to talk about suicide as a phenomenon in South Sudan, his first impulse was that it was not really a wide spread problem. But towards the end of the interview he started to reflected on the possibility of there being more suicides than people believe:

> Tapoi: When you first talked to me about suicide what immediately came to my mind was somebody hanging himself in a tree, or somebody shooting himself. But in fact we could be losing a lot of people to suicide (...) The incidents of people collapsing and dying is common, but people don´t consider it suicide.

Something similar happened during the interview of Esther. As we finished the interview and the recorder was turned of, she added that several more cases came to her mind, and now that she started to think about it she would be sure to remember more cases during the days to come, and she seemed surprised to realise how many cases she knew about.

6.1 Challenges associated by being a man

Traditionally there are two roles that a man has to achieve if he is to be considered a real man. The first is that he has to get married and to get children to secure the lineage. The second role is related to the first and is to be a respectable head of the family. Being head of the family implies being the provider and the protector of the family, and to be in control over the family´s resources including his wife/wives and children (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Kizza, 2012; Perner, 2001). In the following some of the burdens associated with fulfilling the expectation of becoming married will be presented.

6.1.1 Socialization

Some of the informants talked about how they during childhood were socialized into defined gender roles. The boy is taught from an early age to act responsibly and brave to prepare himself for the responsibility he will have to undertake as a grown man. Tapoi tells about how a little boy who falls and hurts himself and starts to cry is being told not to cry like a girl. According to Tapoi this upbringing

"makes you feel less a man when you (...) accept to swallow something which society accept as humiliation."

> Tapoi: I think it has come a long way (..) from our ancestors who tried to portray the man as a super human being, and it has come from generation to generation. Even up to the time we grow up in the early eighties it was unacceptable for you as a boy to be in the kitchen or to be seen washing the plates. They would say no, that is the work of your sisters. (..) Because of the special place that society created for the men, it is what made them not to accept defeat.

This is in line with what Cohler & Smith (2006) found when interviewing young Dinka men living in US. The young Dinkas explained that they were socialized into becoming responsible men by gradually taking on more and more tasks, herding cattle being the dominant responsibility. The reason that they know they are men is because they have developed the ethic of and capacity for responsibility (Cohler & Smith, 2006).

6.1.2 To be (come) a man you have to be married

As we have already seen the expectations associated with being a man in South Sudan is strongly related to being married. In fact a man is not considered being an adult before he is married, and the consequences of not being married prohibits participation in public decision-making and can give rise to shame and social sanctions (Deng, 1972; Dolan, 2002; Perner, 2001; Sommers & Schwartz, 2011). The war has led to less possible ways of generating income, thus making it difficult for men to live up to the expectations to become married (Kizza, 2012).

Problems with paying the dowry

Several of the informants had stories about how the demand for bride price created problems for some men. The problem of mobilizing dowry can be explained partly by the reduction of ways to accumulate wealth due to long lasting wars, in line with what Dolan (2002) found in North Uganda (Dolan, 2002). The dowry economy has expansive financial and social significance in the South Sudanese community. Male and female youth must marry to be recognized as adults, and consequently male youth are under severe pressure to meet escalating dowry costs.

Gangura explains that young men and women elope because they cannot afford to pay the requested dowry. If the family finds out that the girl´s virginity "has been broken", they will chase her to that boy's home and force the boy to marry her in order to secure the dowry.

> Gangura: Then at times some people who don´t have any way to get money (…) that´s also another fearing point for them. (…) You find somebody also have killed himself because he could not afford to pay the money required for him to pay (…) if they find you with their daughter or with her sister they will be cross inside, they will beat you up. Then sometimes, somebody who is not strong hearted who can not stand the fighting when that inside he hear that this people have realised that I am going with their sister or their daughter, what they will do, the person will just say ok before they come to kill me let me just finish myself.

Edith tells another story about a man from her village who hanged him self at the end of 2012 after a dispute about dowry. His girlfriend had died and left him with three children. The relatives of the deceased woman came and demanded that he should marry the dead body because there had never been paid dowry. They refused to burry the woman before the issue of dowry was settled, and the body remained in the house. The man did not refuse to pay, but without the cows or money he watned to postpone the payment. The relatives did not accept this and maintained that the woman could not be buried before the dowry was paid.

> Edith: After that the man just said that ok, you need money now? (..) I´m going to bring the money. (...) He entered inside and removed a rope, climbed on the table, put it around his neck and hanged himself. After breaking the door the relatives found the man dead.

The consequences can be brutal and even lead someone to choose suicide, as these two examples illustrate. Men and women find their way to be together even though there are no means of bride wealth, but at a high risk. This was also reported in the newspaper Sudan Tribune: A man that was rescued from attempting suicide claimed that his reason was that "he had been robbed off his five children by his in-laws on charges that he had never paid a bride price because he could not afford to pay" (Dak, 2008).

Perner (2001) found an inconsistence in what is assumed and communicated to be the official cultural rules and norms in the society and what actually happens in the lived lives. When he did his study on sexual behaviour in Southern Sudan he found that all sexual life are restricted by customary law, which does not allow sexual intercourse before or outside of marriage, and the consequences of breaking the law could lead to severe punishment. However, in reality he found that there was a great liberty in sexual behaviour during adolescence and while married. He found that as long as sex did not result in pregnancies it was not made a problem. But if a woman falls pregnant arrangements for marriage should be made in order to secure bride price (Perner, 2001). Other sources claim that South Sudan women who are not virgins are considered less desirable, even if it is a result of rape (Stern, 2011), thus reducing the chances of getting a good bride-price. Although elopement is common, it is dangerous as the men runs the risk of being badly beaten or killed by the relatives of the girl, as encountered by Gangura. They also run the risk of having to serve long prison sentences. This has led some men to join

militia groups as a way of securing their own protection. They are given a gun and the protection of the group. There are also reports that they use this opportunity to loot properties in order to help pay dowry (Sommers & Schwartz, 2011), adding to the violent environment. In fact the few possible ways for income motivates some young men to take part in cattle raiding hoping that it will help them pay dowries (Sommers & Schwartz, 2011). This development is being fuelled by the easy access to weapons as tools for acquiring economic goods, and contributes to the increase of violence in the community (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005). Even though many argue that the problem related to the dowry economy has increased due to war, this cultural institution has caused troubles and conflict in earlier times as well. Old records about Dinka tells stories of girls who have hanged themselves because they were prevented from marrying the man they love, the reason being that the families involved didn´t agree on the bride-price (Titherington, 1927).

No control over wife or girlfriend

Another problem that all of the informants explained was the humiliation that men could feel if their wife or girlfriend got involved with another man. Several talked about men coming back from war finding their wife with a new man. Edith says she knows of four or five men who have killed themselves because their wives have been involved with another man.

> Interviewer: but the woman, if the man gets another woman? She doesn´t mind?
>
> Edith: she doesn´t mind

This quotation shows the differences in the expectation to what men and women should expect. As we shall se later, it is not all that easy for women to accept that men gets involved with another women, but it might have other reasons than pride. In a polygamous society women are expected to accept that a man can have several wives. Zahera tells the story of a man who hanged himself because he suspected that his girlfriend was involved with another man. Gangura gives a very detailed account of a day when he was seven years old, and had to accompany his mother to his uncle's house after receiving the message that his uncle was dead by suicide. When they arrived they found him still hanging in the living room.

> Interviewer: Did he give any reason?
>
> Gangura: He did not really give a written information as to why he killed himself (..) but later on, after we carried our own investigation to know exactly what happened, we

> realised that he was having a problem with his wife. I think the wife either wanted to divorce him, or he suspected her of going with another man.

Okot knew two men, one of them being a close relative, who both chose to end their life because their wives left them. He philosophizes on what the reason could be for choosing to end ones life in a situation like that:

> Okot: Could be the reason for living is to see the family living together (...) When a person commits suicide it is very serious in our village. (…) Which means breaking away from family life to other people is no longer life?

This last quotation supports the view that the purpose of life for a man is to be married and have children. If a man looses his wife, and she takes away his children, there is no longer life (Deng, 1972). This is confirmed by reports of men killing their wives when returning from the front-line to find their wife involved with another man. There are also reports of this being the reason for men killing themselves (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005).

Murder-suicide

Murder-suicide refers to someone who after murdering his or her family or others follows these homicides with suicide (Honkasalo, 2014; Lester, 2009a). There are many reports in media of murder-suicides in South Sudan (Bol, 2008; Nakimangole, 2008, 2013; Turnbull, 2005) and in Southern Sudan refugee communities (Turnbull, 2005). Five of the informants gave examples of this phenomenon, and is here illustrated by a story told by Topoi.

> Tapoi: My brother in law committed suicide (..) And the reason is that he killed my mother, and killed my adopted brother and he shot my niece. He thought she was dead but she did not die. And then he committed suicide. (…) He was afraid of the repercussion. Maybe he could not stand and be arrested and going through all the interrogation and all that. (…)

Tapoi was not in the country himself at that time, but from what he was told, his family interfered after an episode were his sister was beaten until she was unconscious. He thinks that his brother-in-law probably feared that the family would take his wife away from him.

> Tapoi: I think (..) it was the fear that they could take the wife away from him that provoked him to come and kill her. (..) It is an embarrassment when a wife is taken away from you because of your misbehaviour. Society will not respect you, the way they would if you are a married man."

Men are perpetrators in more than 90% the cases of murder-suicide, while women are most likely the victims. This has led some to argue that murder-suicide can be seen as a gender issue (Honkasalo, 2014).

6.1.3 Responsibilities as a provider and a protector

Deng explains about the labour division in the house. While women take care of "the small things" in the house, the man has to support the family "in everything". If he succeeds in this he wins the respect of the family and the community, but if he fails the feeling of shame can sometimes lead to suicide. This is in line with what Kizza (2012) found when studying suicide among the Acholi in Uganda. When families are displaced because of war there is limited access to land and cattle, which are the main sources for production and accumulation of wealth. This, she found, could be threatening to men´s integrity and lead to a feeling of shame (Deng, 1972; Kizza, 2012)

Loosing property and income

The informants gave many examples of suicidal acts among men that they thought were caused by the inability to provide for his family. Police investigations of several suicide cases in Rumbek also reported this as assumed reasons. One was allegedly being insulted by his mother for not taking care of her, while another man failed to fulfil the family´s demand for support (Mayon, 2012). Esther tells that she have heard several stories about men killing themselves because they fail to fulfil their responsibilities.

> Esther: In South Sudan mostly those suicides caused by responsibility. (…) You have a wife, you have a kid, you don´t have work, you never know how to feed those kids. You never know how to run your family. That´s what mostly lead to also to suicide.
> (…)
> Now there is nowhere he can manage to get some business here or there in order to run the family. The frustration leads to him committing suicide.
>
> Interviewer: I heard someone say yesterday that when a man cannot be a breadwinner he is even more traumatized than a woman. So I was thinking, what is this? Does it have to do with identity, or shame or stigma?
>
> Esther: Especially for those fathers, like you don´t have identity, now the woman is the one feeding the family, and you have no power over your family. (..) It´s a shame on him to be there and not being able to take the responsibility. That´s why most of them are committing suicide.

Cohler & Smith (2006) found that one of the most important values associated with being a Dinka man was that he should take responsibility by providing for his family. To be "a good man" meant to be dedicated to his family. That is how he earns respect from his extended family and his village: "The devotion of his children, the faithfulness of his wife in love, and her faith in his ability to direct family affairs" (Cohler & Smith, 2006).

The quote from Esther shows that when a man fail to provide for his family it is even worse when the women has taken over the role of the provider that he is expected to fulfil. The traditional family set-up with stereotyped gender roles have been disrupted by war, with women often taking on new on traditional male duties (Leatherman, 2011). In today´s South Sudan women head two out of five households (Veldwjik, 2011).

6.1.4 Pride an honour

As we have seen pride an honour is a returning theme when the informants gives examples of men they know that have died by suicide. Deng explains that for Nilotic men pride is very important. They see themselves as warriors and freedom fighters, and they cannot accept defeat. They raid cattle from each other in order to prove themselves as men so that the women will notice them.

> Deng: If somebody says that you are wrong you don´t want to accept it. Cause if you accept it you will be like a woman or a child.
>
> (…)
>
> I think most of the men when they fail in life… In South Sudan the majority are Nilotic, and (..) they believe they are the first class. But if your wife sees that you are failure, and your colleges are successful, that give you that bad heart to kill yourself.

We here see how male pride is associated by being warriors, but also how pride is related to ethnicity and the ability to be a man in the eyes of women. This way of portraying men have, according to the informants, been handed over from the earlier generations. All the men raised the issue of pride as a value for men that they saw as hindering them being open about their emotions.

> Tapoi: I think it´s a negative perception (…) We are all human beings and we all have emotions. So what has happened is that society has forced men to suppress to express their emotions. Yeah. Again dealing around pride, prestige, honour…

They saw this as directly related to the theme of the interview, as they saw counselling as the most important initiative to prevent suicide. In fact a few of them had been counselling friends or neighbours who had tried to end their lives.

> Deng: So, with the pride is not good. Even others they die without testifying their problem, earing out their problem. Because if you ear out your problem others may took it for granted while they have their problems also. So most of the people die quiet with most of the problem they don´t share it with people. Because you are a man.
>
> Interviewer: so for a man you are not supposed to reveal that you have problems?
>
> Deng: cannot tell anyone.
>
> Interviewer: so, if I get you right you think that the reason why also so many men commit suicide is also that they are not able to ear out their problems?
>
> Deng: Yes. If they ear out their problem they would be relieved.

The men also knew that women shared their problems, and they assumed that this made the women more resilient toward suicide.

6.1.5 Loosing hope

Some of the informants talked about how men often compared themselves to other men. And with growing economic differences after the war (Sommers & Schwartz, 2011), seeing others success can put a poor man into a worse light and give him a feeling of failure. One quotation from Deng can illustrate a point made by several of the informants, that the tolerance of accepting to be poor was reduced when the country won independence:

> Deng: So now you live in the country, your own country, you don´t have a job and there is nothing at all, so there is no hope. So such people also kill themselves, including the officers, army officers, police officers and even civil administrators.

This analysis is shared with State Minister of Culture, Social Development, Youth and Sports, Patrick Lodinga Kotein. He was interviewed in Gurtong Newspaper regarding the high numbers of suicides seen in Eastern Equatoria:

> People are nowadays busy hanging themselves around Torit and everywhere in the State simply because of dynamic frustration. During the 22 years of civil wars, it did not mean people had no problems but they had numerous ones. They saw and perceived themselves equal as there were

> no payment for whatever it was done. (…) People depended on reliefs as opposed to nowadays seeing people employed and be paid with disparity (Nakimangole, 2013, 10th of March).

Alcohol abuse

All the men talked about alcohol as a problem for many men, even for some women. Okot saw the drinking among some as a death wish, that the abusive drinking was a suicidal act, while the others interpreted the drinking as a way of dealing with trauma, depression and the feeling of hopelessness.

> Gangura: You find a young person who was born, who was born maybe in 1993, shortly when the war started. This person grew up during the war and had no opportunity to go to school, joined the army and fought. And the war ended. The war has now ended and he can´t get a job. He can´t get a job. He sits, depressed, so many young people have given themselves to drinking alcohol. So they drink a lot of alcohol, their life, they feel their life is not worth living and coupled with depression they die! I know so many young people who have died (…) to depression since the war ended.

This quotation shows how the frustration and the feeling of inadequacy lead men into a destructive drinking pattern. There is a strong association between alcohol and suicidality (Rossow, 2001). Excessive use of alcohol can also lead to different kinds of violence and neglect that affects their wife and children. The reduced impulse control as a result of alcohol can get these men into more serious problems that again ads to the life difficulties and humiliation.

6.2 Challenges associated by being a woman

6.2.1 Girls as a source of income for the family

Traditionally many tribes have allowed young people to choose their own spouse. In theory girls have been allowed to marry any man who is able to produce a suitable bride price. Consequently, this may be more difficult for young men because of the requiring of cattle for bride price as we have seen discussed above (Deng, 1972; Stern, 2011). Although others claim that the system of bride dowry is contributing to the low value of women because it implies that a woman is a property to be paid for and that her virginity is a commodity to be traded (Leatherman, 2011). None of the informants raised the issue of forced or arranged marriages directly, but Zahera had several statements of women being treated like properties, and others also gave stories that implied women´s lack of codeterminations when it came to her husband marrying more wives. Further the quotation from Gangura mentioned later about the danger a man risks if he gets involved with a girl without paying bride price. This can be understood

related to the value the girl carries on behalf of her paternal family. There are reports that many families feel forced to marry off their daughters at an early age for economic purposes, leaving young girls with limited control over their lives. To escape marrying a man they do not want to marry some girls choose to end their life (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Perner, 2001; Sommers & Schwartz, 2011; Stern, 2011). In this way, the increase of child marriages in South Sudan may be seen as one of the ways that women are affected by poverty. Perner (2001) writes that some girls refuse to marry. He refers to a Murle (a Nilotic tribe in South Sudan) informant who said that in such cases the girl will be tortured until she accepts to marry because she is the income of the family.

It is not possible to be sure whether it was not mentioned because they did not relate it to problems of suicide, or they just did not think of it during the interview.

6.2.2 The role as a mother

The most important duty for a wife is the bearing of children, and the new bride is expected to "replace the cows" of her husband´s family by giving birth to many children (Stern, 2011).

Okot explaines how important children are to a woman:

> Okot: When a mother has nobody to help to support now (…) like when children dies, many children dye, mother is left alone. Then the mother will also commit suicide immediately, on seeing the children die, for the cases of the war which happened in southern Sudan very many mothers killed themselves. (…)
>
> Interviewer: as a result of the war?
>
> Okot: the war! Because the children were killed, now they are left alone, they are of no use because they live for their children. Then they commit suicide.

The sequence from the interview has two points: One is that when a mother looses her children there is no one to support her, and the other point refers to her purpose in life as to secure the coming generations. The strong association of the female reproductive role can also be illustrated by an example given by Harragin & Chol (1999). They found that a widow with children had a slightly better chance at court, because at least she can claim assistance for the sake of the children. Without children she is much more likely to be neglected. One episode the authors claims can illustrate this last point happened

when Nuer burned down huts in a village in 1991. A mother, seeing her children being burned to death entered the burning hut to also end her life (Harragin & Chol, 1999).

Being a mother is also known to be a protective factor against suicide (Canetto, 2009), and this was verbalised by two of the informants. Edith explained that a mother could not take her life because "nobody can love the child like a mother". Esther emphasised the strength of "African women" arguing that they can endure "anything" for the sake of their family:

> Esther: For the South Sudan women, they are called African women, they are hard! They manage to work, to do anything in order to keep the family. Even washing, cleaning, digging (..) If the man is not there she can do any petty work, even undefined work. (..)

While for men it is different, she explains. If they loose their job and position many of them are not willing to do undefined´ work, even if is to keep their family. This, she said, had to do with men´s pride.

6.2.3 No escape

Domestic abuse

There are many reports concluding that domestic violence is an increasing problem in South Sudan (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005). This was especially described by one of the informants in this study. Zereda has been involved in a women´s association that, among other things, helps women with legal assistance if they have problems. She knows of several women that have ended their life to escape an unbearable situation in their homes. In one of the cases she told about a woman from her hometown was mistreated by her husband. The woman took the case to court to try to get a divorce, but even though she had scars all over her body from the mistreatment, the court decided that she had to go back to her husband. As a consequence the woman hanged herself. Reflecting on this case, and with reference to other similar stories of domestic abuse, Zereda concludes:

> Zereda: Then I think maybe when she saw the torture at the house, she thought maybe it´s better for her to die. So she hanged herself (..) I think it´s a bit common in our place.
>
> Interviewer: You said that you think it´s quite common in you area. What did you mean by that?
>
> Zereda: It is because the cultural behaviour of people. In the area women are treated like they are just properties. (..) So a man can do what ever he wants with you. And then with

> that stress in you, and then also secondly the polygamy, and then you don´t have any decision about your life.

Zereda here gives an example of how trapped women can be in her marriage, even when there is evidence that she is abused the family and the community fail to help her. One reason for this can be the cultural practice for most of the tribes in South Sudan of having to return the bride wealth, or at least some of it (Deng, 1972; Perner, 2001). This situation of women not getting necessary assistance by the juridical system is also conformed in a report written by Harragin & Chol for Save the Children (UK). The report describes how vulnerable Dinka widows often are being neglected by their in-laws in spite of the custom of wife inheritance, a custom that is supposed to make sure that a widow is being provided for. Some women take these cases of neglect to the court, but it is rear that women are able to get the same protection from court as men (Harragin & Chol, 1999). Although the South Sudanese Civil Law secures equal rights for women, cultural practices and customary law still endure. Customary law is not written, it varies between tribes and clans, and is administered by "the elders", who are only men (Stern, 2011). Zahera explains how cases of domestic violence are solved traditionally, with calling in the family. However, to involve the extended family in such cases can be a risk for the mistreated woman because it can lead to more threats from her husband. She argues:

> Zahera: if the court can come up strongly and defend women who are being tortured or who are being beaten, at least that can help.

She continues by giving another example of domestic abuse, and tells about a16 year old girl who was orphaned and had to live with her uncle together with her younger brothers.

> Zahera: And then they were mistreating them so much. Sometimes they could not give food even to the young (…) brothers. So, and then they were making her to labour a lot. Lots of work, all the domestic work is done by her. And then from there she just decided to commit suicide.

Again this shows how reliant girls and women are on the family they live in, with no good support system that is in place to fight their cause.

Falling pregnant with other than your husband

> Zahera: for example like soldiers, if he was married before he go for the war, now he is in warfront, a woman will stay here, for example a young girl of maybe eighteen, seventeen. That young girl cannot wait for five years for this soldier. And then if he comes there and he find this lady is already, maybe she got a man and maybe she delivered with this man, and then he will

maybe torture this lady so much because how could she have another man and then when I was in frontline. So it is really torture for this lady also.

Gargunga: The husband is coming from were he went. At times she will be pregnant and when the husband comes there will be problems. So what she will do is she say let me kill myself before he comes. That one also happens, but I have heard of it but I have not seen it. But it happens. This one for girls, taking some drugs and kill and die. I have seen that one several times.

6.2.4 Polygamy

Several of the informants mentioned the cultural practise of polygamy as a possible reason for women to end their lives. When talking about how women are treated as men´s properties, Zahera added "…and then there is polygamy…" Although I did not ask Zahera to elaborate on what she meant by plainly mentioning the word polygamy, my understanding was that she understood the institution of polygamy as adding to the women feeling as a commodity; someone´s property. She later elaborates:

> Zahera: in our culture you know you are staying with your husband, everything being very normal, and suddenly after your husband is getting some little money he went out and (…) bring more women. And then now looking at you like you are nothing. (…) And if you say you want to divorce this man nobody can allow you. You go everywhere they will be arrested and bringing you for this man. So there is no option for them..

Okot talks about polygamy or polygyny as a family problem:

> Okot: When father tend to love other, (…) and leaving out the others family members to suffer. That one also causes death [suicide]. That is what is taking place in our villages.

It is reasonable to understand this quote as an example of a husband taking a new wife, although it can also be about neglecting the family within a culture of polygyny. Regardless of which of the situations Okot had in mind, the quotation serves as an example of the difficulties that can arise within a cultural frame where men are allowed to take up multiple partners, while the wives are dependent on him as a provider. Gangura, on the other hand, emphasizes the emotional stress women can experience when their husband decides to take another wife:

> Gangura: In Africa polygamy is very rampant. Maybe she hears that he is getting another girl or something like that. She would say let me kill myself. She is very, very annoyed. (…) I have also seen that happening.

Okot´s statement is in line with what Zeiten (2008) found in East African contemporary polygamous families. He found that hey were often were characterized by rivalry and jealousy centred around access to limited resources as the wives have to struggle to secure enough funds for their own children´s needs (Zeitzen, 2008). In South Sudan a man can marry as many women as he can afford to pay bride prise for (Stern, 2011). Polygamy implies an asymmetry between men and women in that only men are allowed to marry several women, while women can only be married to one man at a time (Zeitzen, 2008). This custom, along with the custom of wife inheritance, also paves the road for the spread of sexual transmitted infections, including HIV (Stern, 2011). Deng also pointed to this negative consequence: he referred to a man having several wives:

> Deng: I think syphilis is high (…) So that one brings problem, also it brings differences when the wife die, the husband feels bad also about this woman, and he starts beating this woman [his other wife], or hate her, deny her food and many thing. Then also he may marry another woman, and if that sickness was not treated it will be the same with that woman, and the man can kill himself.

Perner (2001), when conducting his study on sexual behaviour in Southern Sudan, found that polygamy also puts much stress on the husbands on meeting the demands of several wives (Perner, 2001), and this is also reported from studies in other African countries (Zeitzen, 2008). Studies from Liberia and Sierra Leone found that polygamy and the enforcement of bride keeps the poor men as youth and denies them the chance to form recognized families (Richards, 2006).

6.2.5 Women are allowed to show vulnerability

All of the informants talked about the differences for men and women when it came to responding to life difficulties. Men are not allowed to cry, they were thought that already as boys, while women are considered week, and that gives them the advantage of getting sympathy and advice from others:

> Deng: if they [women] fail in life they cry (..) and sometimes move back to their family to live with the parents. Or she can see other men who can support her.

This statement also shows that the picture of women being trapped in an unhappy marriage is not one-sided. Sometimes she moves back to her family. Perner found that women often felt strong because of the help they received from their father and brothers (Perner, 2001). Gangura emphasises the resilience of women:

> Gangura: I have not heard of many women committing suicide. Mostly it is being men. (…) I think the women have been able to cope up. Weather it is humiliation or embarrassment or even

> when they have their prestige or pride (…) stepped on. I think they have been able to … the humiliation than men.

When the informants reflected on why they though more men than women died by suicide, many of them said that it is not socially acceptable for men to talk about their personal problems. Women on their side are allowed to show that they are "weak", and therefore had the opportunity to share their problems.

> Tupoi: I have heard (..) that women have sheared the idea with their fellow women, that maybe thy will try to commit suicide, something of asking an advice. Maybe because society has accepted that, you know, the women are weaker.

> Edith: Even me, sometimes that feeling comes to my heart, that I want to kill my self, if I am alone. Then it is better to sit with a group of friends and to have their advice until that feeling leaves your heart.

6.3 Difference coping strategies between men and women

All of the informants emphasized the importance of counselling or being able to talk with friends when somebody had thoughts about ending their lives. However, they saw different cultural practices as hindrances for pursuing help, as well as ignorance and lack of health services.

Most of the informants talked about shame and stigma as causes for people being isolated from the community. And they expressed the need for overcoming stigma, and being able to reach out to people that were at risk of becoming isolated from the community. All the informants emphasized the importance of social support and counselling to prevent suicide, and a few suggested the need of counselling centres.

> Zahera: When people are hurt they can talk about what is hurting them. But also silence can cause a lot of (…) because for my case if I´m stressed today and I don´t talk about it I´ll be hurt so much. Unless I express my self, I talk it out then I get relived. So some people hide their problems, and then on top of it they don´t want to talk about it. Those are the ones that can easily commit suicide. Because they don´t express themselves easily.

7 General discussion

Culture develops in response to the socio-economic environment, and by better understanding the culture we also gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the suicidal act in a specific context (Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2010). It is impossible to conclude on whether the suicide rate has increased or decreased during or after war in South Sudan based on this small sample. Furthermore, there are no reliable statics on suicide dating back for the country. Culture is a fluid term and constantly changing in response to the environment, and thus the war situation has to be taken into consideration when trying to understand culture in South Sudan. The poverty and unemployment combined with massive health challenges and limited health services results in unsolved and untreated states for many people which are all factors that contributes to a poorer mental health and a higher vulnerability to suicidality. This seems to create challenges for men, as they are supposed to be the providers and protectors of their families. Several researchers have suggested that the gender roles changes in response to war (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005), and this can be supported by the findings in this study. The challenges described by the informants as assumed reasons for people to be involved in a suicidal act can be related to structural difficulties derived from war situation. Other studies suggest that while war seem to contribute to women taking up new duties and roles, men seem to have more difficulties to adjust (Dolan, 2002; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Stern, 2011).

7.1 The maintenance of traditional gender roles

Although the law has been changed to secure equality between men and women, and women are secured 25 per cent of the seats in the government (Arabi, 2011), there are still reports on structural inequality in the country. In fact Care claims that South Sudan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a woman (Care, 2014). Why do women accept the symbolic order that justify men´s domination over women? Or do they? According to Bourdieu (2000) the institutions plays a key role in reproducing inequality. We have seen how the institution of family and the dowry economy still are crucial in defining the roles that are acceptable for men and women. For men the purpose of existing is the ability to carry on the lineage (Deng, 1972; Perner, 2001). This is what is meaningful according to traditional values. When men are not able to meet the cultural expectations they loose the sense of meaning, as reported in the interviews many men lost hope when they were unable to provide. According to Berger (1974) the main purpose of culture is to produce meaning. Decades of war have threatened the maintenance of maybe the most important producer of meaning to the South Sudanese people, namely the family. When the meaning system is weakened the individuals cannot rely on the traditional values and norms, and leaves them in search of meaning. According to Berger loosing the

sense of meaning is the most unbearable for the individual (Berger, 1974). This situation is referred to as anomic, meaning a crisis in the moral order of a social group, and suggests that this increases the risk of suicide in the population (Berger, 1974; Durkheim, 1978; McGuire, 2008). The reports from the informants give a picture of a society that is centred around family and procreation, and this is in line with Bourdieu´s findings. The institution of marriage, including the system of dowry and the organizing of family life, is reproducing gendered stereotypes. Even though the informants stated that they considered some of cultural practices that reproduces gender inequalities as unfortunate, they simultaneously expressed the difficulty in breaking with the old customs.

7.2 Does gender roles change in response to war?

As we have seen, masculinity in South Sudan is strongly associated with being married and to procreate. This involves being the provider, protector and the head of the family. Having male children is essential to secure the older age and to ensure that the family name lives on (Deng, 1972; Perner, 2001). Not being able to fulfil these expectations are main reasons for men to end their lives by suicide, according to the informants.

In order to fulfil these expectation men need access to resources. But decades of war have thrown the country into poverty, people have been forced to flee from their fields, have lost their animals, and there are few opportunities for education and jobs. This has resulted in limited ways of achieving the status of a man, and many men as old as forty years are still regarded boys or youth as they have not been able to marry (Dolan, 2002; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005). How do men respond to such a situation?

Both men and women are embedded in gendered system, and consequently, both men and women are affected when there are changes in gender scripts. This can create tension as both men and women struggle to find their new identities and how to respond and act with changing expectations (Cohler & Smith, 2006; Lorentzen, 2011). Some argue that the only role left for men to exercise is to be the head of the household, including controlling the labour and productivity of women and children. This creates frustration among women who feels that much of the burden of the war has fallen on them while adult men falls into passivity (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005). Some men become very abusive. This may of course have many reasons, o, but it could be read into an understanding of male frustration associated with the fear of demasculinization. In a culture where a husband is allowed to discipline his wife, fuelled by the feeling of humiliation and shame, the road to domestic violence is shortened (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005). As we have seen from the interviews it can be difficult for some women to escape an abusive husband. This has partly to do with the dowry economy and the customary law dictating the return of bride

wealth in cases of divorce. Often the family of the woman are unable or unwilling to return the bride wealth, and the woman has to continue living under those conditions. Secondly, as Zahera explained, the Statuary courts often fail to assist abused women also. As reported in the interviews, some women choose to escape this situation by suicide.

Other women, either with the help of their maternal family or by themselves, manage to leave their husbands. It can be as a result of abuse or because the husband is not able to fulfil his duties as a provider. This again creates a feeling of shame and humiliation within a man, and several of the informants reported this as the assumed reason for men to try to end their lives.

Studies conducted in Southern Sudan indicate that the war served as a catalyst for many women to begin to break with their customary gender roles. Many women are the sole provider for their children. After the second civil war humanitarian organisations employed women, and this also added to women´s possibilities of entering the labour marked as they achieved new skills and experiences (Arabi, 2011). For men returning from war finding the women occupying positions that traditionally were restricted to men, while they themselves were unemployed, gave rise to frustration and further frustration among men.

As the informants indicate that men seem to be more vulnerable to suicide than women. This is congruent to what we see in most countries including the latest estimates from WHO (WHO, 2014). There are many accounts of traditional gender roles being challenged in response to new demands and changes in the society, and more specifically due to war. While women are reported to take on new responsibilities and use this opportunity to adopt new roles, men seem to have more difficulties manoeuvring when fundamental institutions break down, as we have seen when the means of acquiring a family and to hold on to the family crumble. This has led several researchers to talk about masculinity in crisis.

7.3 Masculinity in crisis

Traditional masculinity is shown to be a key risk factor for males to develop maladaptive coping strategies. Möller-Leimkühler (2003) suggest that the gender gap in suicide can be explained by the perceived reduction in social role opportunities for men leading to social exclusion (Möller-Leimkühler, 2003). The informants in this study have reported that shame and humiliation leads to isolation, alcoholism and suicide among some men. This is confirmed by Tankink & Richters (2007) who finds that the humiliation and loss of dignity that many men faced by not being able to protect their women

combined with frustration and alcohol and/or drug abuse has increased the incidence of domestic violence (Tankink & Richters, 2007). This shows how a maladaptive male behaviour, domestic violence, affects women´s lives, and in some cases also leads to suicide among women.

While most of the informants in this study seem to expect women to endure more humiliation or to be more flexible and resilient in response to the many life difficulties in South Sudan, they draw a picture of men as having fewer opportunities to develop their roles. Dolan (2002) found was that the variety of ways to achieve masculinity was reduced due to war. Many had been forced to flee, and lost both their animals and their land as a result. In addition the war had deprived most of them from a proper education, hence leaving them with limited options of getting a job in a competitive job marked. Bear in mind the importance of getting married and maintaining a family, this, he found, laid the ground for humiliation and frustration leading to alcoholism and increased violence and sometimes suicide. As a war tactic he also found that soldiers and rebel forces regularly raped women, also adding to the humiliation of men not being able to protect their women (Dolan, 2002). The findings are also confirmed in other studies in South Sudan that have seen the crisis of masculine identity can easily spill over into violence (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005).

7.3.1 Increase of violence

Different sources confirm that gender based violence (GBV) is prevalent in South Sudan, although there is a lack of statistics and studies. Easy access to small arms, the ´hyper-masculinity´ related by men´s experiences as combatants, the social accept of disciplining a wife and using domestic violence to do so, and the lack of redress for GBV under customary and statutory law all contribute to the prevalence of violence against women in South Sudan (Ali, 2011; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005).

The increased independence of women has not been received well by many of the men who have returning home, and it has been suggested that male frustration has led to increased domestic violence (Bubenzer & Stern, 2011). For women the increasing domestic violence makes their situation sometimes unbearable. And for men to come and find women occupying the positions they used to hold has led to a crisis of masculinity. The men could also find it humiliating to come home as freedom fighters, only to find them selves without a job. Seeing, and according to the informants interviewed, some of them could not bear to live on. When men fail to fulfil their role as providers and protectors of the household they may turn to violence as a means of maintaining control and power (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005).

One type of gender-based violence is sexual based violence (SBV). We know from armed conflict many places in the world that sexual based violence is often used as weapon of war (Leatherman, 2011) because of the efficiency in destroying ethnic, religious or national groups (Rittner & Roth, 2012). Being a victim of sexual violence has serious physical and psychological consequences for the victim (Tankink & Richters, 2007).

During a consultative meeting between the community, civil administration and military leaders discussing "unexpected, excessive and uncharacteristic violence & destruction caused in Equatoria Region by resent army deserters" (Anon, 2002 p 2) the following impact was noted:

> Rape of women and men, many of whom have become traumatized. Unwanted pregnancies, which have further led to abortions and miscarriages (in some instances, women have even committed suicide as a result (Anon, 2002 p 3).

Playing on male stereotypes

When discussing the phenomenon of collective violence, Bond argues that in addition to specific social, political and historical premises there has to be some cultural characteristics that allows men to involve themselves in the violence (Bond, 2007). Hutchinson (2005) claims to see a development in war ethics among Nuer and Dinka combats after the splitting of SPLA in 1991. There used to be restricted local ethical codes for warfare that prohibited targeting unarmed women, children and elderly persons and also condemned the burning of houses and slashing of crops. Gradually there has been a brutalization of the war through extensive violent coaching. Unaccompanied minors have been isolated in camps for military training, and taught to kill and torture on command. Thus, existing ethics regulating what one can do to others has been deliberately broken down by military leaders, which has led to rapes and murders of civilians, including women, elders and children (Hutchinson, 2005). Dolan studying masculinity in North Uganda found similar mechanisms'. He found that hegemonic models of masculinity are used by the state to manipulate men by linking masculinity with ethnicity (Dolan, 2002).

7.3.2 Consequences for women

In the post-war environment of few opportunities of accumulating wealth, many families rely more on their daughter dowry. This can also promote polygamy. Many wives give many daughters, and the father can collect bride price for all of them. This can also be a reason why girls are being married off young, as they need time to give birth to many children (Sommers & Schwartz, 2011). Another reason

for girls being married off very young is to ensure that their virginity is still intact. With high levels of rape (HRW, 2014), early marriage can be seen as a guarantee to make sure that the family will get the full bride price.

7.4 Power dynamics between men and women

As we have seen, there is much evidence to back up the fact that women are being oppressed in South Sudan. The illiteracy among women is around 85 % (CIA, 2014), girls are being married of at an early age to "the highest bidder", and women and girls are vulnerable to being victims of sexual and domestic violence. However, the South Sudanese woman identity is not one-dimensional. South Sudanese women come forward as strong and with a clear voice. The question is then; how can this be? To find an answer for this, we need to explore and understand the power relation between men and women in South Sudan?

We have seen how men are dependent on their wives to maintain their honour. If a woman cheats on her husband, or threatens to leave him, it can be life threatening for her as the scorned husband may turn to violence in frustration and because of humiliation –either toward his wife and family or toward himself. The women are not seen as week and easily controllable, in fact Evens-Prichard (1976) found that the Azande men needed a special magical remedy in order to control their women:

> The poison oracle is a male prerogative and is one of the principal mechanisms of male control and an expression of sex antagonism. For men say that women are capable of any deceit to defy a husband or please a lover, but men at least have the advantage that their oracle poison will reveal secret embraces. If it were not for the oracle it would be of little use to pay bride-wealth, for the most jealous watch will not prevent a woman from committing adultery if she has a mind to do so. And what woman has not? The only thing which the women fear is the poison oracle (Evans-Pritchard, 1976 p. 130).

Perner (2001) found that many of the domestic disputes in South Sudan had the root in women complaining about men not taking care of their sexual needs, and that women felt strong because of the support they had from their father and brothers (Perner, 2001). The interviews also tell stories about several women leaving their husband, or threatening to do so. Cultural scripts cannot easily be generalized beyond a historical and geographical setting (Cohler & Smith, 2006). The disruption of peoples' lives due to the war and the exposure of new customs and new situations through various interventions and interactions with other people and cultures, set in the context of the myriad of ethnic groups (tribes) and languages makes it difficult, if not impossible to say something precise about South Sudan cultural features.

According to Perner´s findings women are part of the reproduction of male stereotypes by clearly preferring strong, proud and self-conceited men (Perner, 2001), and more recent findings shows how some women takes part in ridiculing men who chose not participate in fighting's (Breidlid & Arensen, 2014).

7.5 Limitations

This study sample is too small to make any generalizations, but it might suggest some areas of interest for other studies in future. By balancing these findings with findings from other studies, one can see a tendency of some cultural features that plays a role in the understanding of the suicidal act.

The study sample consists of participants that all had lived outside South Sudan for years of their lives. Deng having lived most of his adult life in Kenya exposed to a mixture of cultures was of the opinion that when people are exposed to other people they learned to be more tolerant to each other. This could be the fact of the informants interviewed. They came across as tolerant and generous in their interpretations of people they knew that had ended their lives or tried to.

The participants came from different tribes, each with distinct cultural roots. Some of the cultural practices that appear in the interviews might be specific for one particular tribe, but they can still serve as examples for the larger structure of clearly defined gender roles that have deep historical roots in the whole region, including neighbouring countries.

The interviews are based on third persons reports, and they are making assumptions of why they think people in South Sudan are considering suicide.

On a more subjective level, a potential bias is that the interviews and the transcriptions were done alone, and there were no time for clarifying rounds with the informants after transcription.

Cultural and language barriers influenced the interviews, and may have led to misunderstandings during the interviews and also in the process of analysis.

Allowing the informants to decide which direction to take during the interviews resulted in that the questions sometimes were asked in different orders from one interview to another. This can elicit different responses (Guest et al., 2011).

Initially I did not clarify with the interviewees how they defined suicide. As the interviews proceeded I realized that the way of understanding suicide might not be all that clear. Thus, the lack of a clear definition on suicide could be a limitation in the study (Silverman et al., 2007)

Further it is a clear limitation that all the interviews and transcriptions were done only by one person. The selection of informants who participated in the research was from different ethnic groups that are culturally diverse.

Finally most of the interviews were conducted in a situation where especially the informants, but also the interviewer, were affected by the fighting that was going on in South Sudan. This might have influenced the interview setting, and the way the interviews progressed. Although my impression was that this was well received, the fact that I lived in South Sudan as a child might have influenced the interview setting as well. One of the informants expressed that it made her more confident that I understood what she talked about. A negative effect on the other hand could be that they omitted some details out of the assumption that I already knew.

8 Conclusion

This study contributes to the overall view that culture affects the way people understand suicidality. More specifically it suggests that the demands and expectations men face associated with stereotyped images of masculinity can increase their vulnerability for suicidality. Furthermore, we have seen that while women are able to adopt new roles when meeting new challenges due to war, many men turn to maladaptive behaviour like abusive drinking, passivity and violence. This affects the women directly, as they become the victims of domestic violence and neglect, as well as being at risk of becoming victims of sexual violence as the community has turned more violent and unsafe. On the other hand women may take up new roles as they enter into the labour marked in order to feed their children when their husbands are not able to provide them, either because he is away at war, dead or unemployed. This has been hard to accept for some men, as it undermines the traditionally defined gender roles. In order to compensate for the feeling of lost power, some become abusive toward their wives to gain a feeling of superiority. For others the humiliation and shame following the failure of being a respected man that can get married, have children, and be able to provide and protect them leads to suicide.

Both the women and the men who have participated in this study see cultural practises that promote gender inequality as having a negative impact on people, to the extent that it sometimes may lead to suicide. Men because they felt trapped in their role, and women because they felt trapped as men´s properties.

In spite of structural injustice, the marginalization of women and various statistics proving the vulnerable situation for women, the South Sudanese women are described as strong and resilient by both the men and women in this study. Maybe the most important reason for women being more resilient and less vulnerable to suicide than men is that they are allowed to show vulnerability and to talk about difficult emotions with their friends. Shortly after the war broke out again at the end of last year, bishop Paride Taban from South Sudan was interviewed in the newspaper Bistandsaktuelt on the future of South Sudan. He points out that men´s pride is one of the rootcauses for many of the problems that South Sudan faces today, and is asking for change:

> I hope our leaders understand that a brave man should be humble. It is a strength, not a weakness. The dynamics that are at work now, is all about shame and fear (translated from Norwegian (Opseth, 2014, March 14).

8.1 Further research

More qualitative studies are needed on how people understand suicide in South Sudan. To get a more detailed insight on how gender roles are reproduced and/or changed a deeper ethnographic study focusing on a specific tribe would be needed. Although there are general cultural features in South Sudan that allows us to discuss gender roles across ethnicity, there are also important differences from tribe to tribe. These cultural varieties can have implications on how more appropriate responses for men can be developed according a specific tradition. This could be helpful in informing a culture sensitive suicide prevention program. How can traditional rituals, ways of healing and restoring "justice" (balance) be used in suicide prevention?

There is also a need for more studies on how crisis of masculinity can give a an increased vulnerability of suicidality, and especially how the development of women´s roles influences men. Based on the findings in this study I find that there is a need for studies where the reciprocity between the sexes are analysed in depth.

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Appendix

1) Interview guide
2) Informed consent
3) Reply from Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelige datatjeneste
4) Research permission

Interview guide:

Introduction:

- Introduction of interviewer.
- Introduction of project: The aim of this project is to gain knowledge of how suicide is understood by South Sudanese.
- Introduction of recorder.
- Informed consent is signed.
- Recorder switched on.

Background information:

ID number:

Gender:

Age:

Level of education:

Ethnic group:

Questions:

1. Have you ever heard of anyone who has committed suicide in South Sudan?
2. What are your thoughts on that?
3. Is there, in your opinion, any situation where committing suicide is more understandable than in other situations?
4. If someone would confess to you that they were thinking about taking their own life, what advice would you give that person?
5. Any other comments?
6. How has it been to be interviewed about this topic?

Request for participation in a research project

"How does South Sudanese understand suicide "

Background and purpose

This is a request for you to participate in a research study that intends to gain knowledge of how suicide is understood by South Sudanese.

What does the study entail?

The study will consist of about eight interviews of South Sudanese. The interviews will be recorded, and later transcribed. The interviews will form the basis for analysis, with the aim of achieving at better understanding of suicide in a South Sudanese context.

Potential advantages and disadvantages

All though suicide exists in every society, the way we understand the phenomenon may vary a lot. To be able to meet people affected by this in a constructive and sensitive way, it is crucial to gain knowledge about how inhabitants of that society reflect on the topic. People affected are persons who has tried to commit suicide, relatives and others who has lost dear ones to suicide, and of course the whole community who experience that one of its members chose to end their life.

What will happen to the information about you?

The recordings of the interviews will be deleted after the research is done (latest the 1th of May 2014), and quotes used in the article will be made anonymous.

The data that are registered about you will only be used in accordance with the purpose of the study as described above. All the data will be processed without name, ID number or other directly recognisable type of information. A code number links you to your data through a list of names.

Only Kristin Berg will have access to the list of names and be able to identify you.
It will not be possible to identify you in the results of the study when these are published.

Voluntary participation

Participation in the study is voluntary. You can withdraw your consent to participate in the study at any time and without stating any particular reason. This will not have any consequences for you. If you wish to participate, sign the declaration of consent on the final page. If you agree to participate at this time, you may later on withdraw your consent without your treatment being affected in any way. If you later on wish to withdraw your consent or have questions concerning the study, you may contact Kristin Berg (phone number: +254 703 358148 or +47 41 563231)

Further information on the study can be found in Chapter A – *Further elaboration of what the study entails.*

The declaration of consent follows Chapter B

Chapter A – Further elaboration of what the study entails

- The participant must be South Sudanese, be more than 18 years old and have a descent understanding of English .
- The research is part of a master degree in Psychosocial work with focus on suicide prevention, at the University of Oslo. The aim of the research is to gain knowledge of attitudes towards suicide in South Sudan.
- The potential advantage of the research is to gain a better understanding of suicide in a South Sudanese context. This knowledge will hopefully be of significance for health- and social workers in their approach toward vulnerable people with suicidal thoughts.
- The interviews might be difficult at times because the subject of the interview is sensitive. Potential discomforts or disadvantages
- The study participant is responsible for letting the interviewer know if or when the questions asked is too difficult, and can at any point stop the interview.
- The study participant will be informed as soon as possible in case new information becomes available that might influence the participant's willingness to participate in the study.

Chapter B – Privacy

Privacy

Information that is registered about you is transcribed on paper and in that process it will be anonymised. The anonymised transcription of the interviews will be locked up, and only the researcher will have access to the material.

The Institute of Clinical medicine at the University of Oslo, represented by its managing director, is responsible for the data processing.

Releasing material and data to other parties

If you agree to participate in the study, you also consent to de-identified data being released to the University of Oslo in Norway.

Right to access and right to delete your data and samples

If you agree to participate in the study, you are entitled to have access to what information is registered about you. You are further entitled to correct any mistakes in the information we have registered. If you withdraw from the study, you are entitled to demand that the collected data are deleted, unless the data have already been incorporated in analyses or used in scientific publications.

Information about the outcome of the study

The participants are entitled to receive information about the result of the study.

Consent for participation in the study

I am willing to participate in the study.

(Signed by the project participant, date)

I confirm that I have given information about the study.

(Signed, role in the study